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SERMONS

PREACHED IN

ENGLAND.

66938

BY THE LATE RIGHT REVEREND

REGINALD HEBER, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF CALCUTTA;

FORMERLY RECTOR OF HODNET, SALOP; PREBENDARY OF ST. ASAPH; AND PREACHER AT LINCOLN'S INN.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET.

MDCCCXXIX.

66938 Regional

TO

SIR ROBERT HARRY INGLIS, BART. M.P.

I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME,

AS A TOKEN OF GRATITUDE FOR THE AFFECTION

SHOWN TO MY HUSBAND'S MEMORY,

BY THE KIND AND JUDICIOUS ASSISTANCE

HE HAS AFFORDED ME IN THE PUBLICATION OF HIS WORKS.

AMELIA HEBER.

Bodryddan, St. Asaph,
Dec. 31, 1828.

PREFACE.

SEVERAL of the sermons now offered to the public were prepared by their Author for publication, and the remainder are considered as so far fitted for the press, as to be entitled to admission in the same series.

This volume will shortly be followed by a distinct work, containing sermons preached in India; and the Editor hopes, at some future period, to print a selection from the parochial sermons preached by her husband at Hodnet.

00066938

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

TIME AND ETERNITY.

[Preached at Lincoln's Inn, 1823, and at Madras, March 4, 1826.]

2 Cor. iv. 18.

PAGE

We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal..

SERMON II.

ON THE PRESENCE OF GOOD ANGELS.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818, and at Lincoln's Inn, Jan. 1822.]

2 Kings vi. 16.

Fear not, for they that be with *us* are more than they which be with *them* 18

SERMON III.

ON THE MINISTRY OF GOOD ANGELS.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818, and at Lincoln's Inn, 1822.]

2 KINGS vi. 16.

PAGE

Fear not, for they that be with *us*, are more than they which be with *them* 42

SERMON IV.

ON THE EXISTENCE AND INFLUENCE OF EVIL SPIRITS.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818, and at Lincoln's Inn, 1822.]

EPHES. vi. 11, 12.

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places 64

SERMON V.

ON THE INSPIRATION OF THE PENTATEUCH.

[Preached at Lincoln's Inn, November 10, 1822.]

EXODUS iii. 14.

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM; and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you 102

SERMON VI.

CHARACTER OF MOSES.

[Preached at Lincoln's Inn, Nov. 17, 1822.]

EXODUS iii. 14.

PAGE

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM, and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you 124

SERMON VII.

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH PHARAOH.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818.]

EXODUS ix. 16.

In very deed for this cause I have raised thee up, for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth 146

SERMON VIII.

ON THE DECREES OF GOD.

[Preached in the Cathedral of St. Asaph, 1819.]

ST. LUKE xix. 42.

If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes 167

SERMON IX.

THE EXTENSION OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

[For the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Preached at Shrewsbury, 1821.]

DANIEL xii. 3.

PAGE

And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever 180

SERMON X.

THE CONVERSION OF THE HEATHEN.

[Preached for the Church Missionary Society, at Whittington, Salop, April 16, 1820.]

ST. MATT. vi. 10.

Thy kingdom come 193

SERMON XI.

THE DISPERSION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

[Preached for the British and Foreign Bible Society, at Shrewsbury, September 5, 1813.]

REV. xiv. 6.

I saw another angel fly in the midst of Heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell in the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people 211

SERMON XII.

THE DUTIES OF THE MINISTRY.

[Preached at Chester, 1819.]

ST. MATT. ix. 38.

PAGE

Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest 232

SERMON XIII.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THE POOR.

[Preached before the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, at St. Paul's Cathedral, June, 1823.]

ST. LUKE vii. 22.

To the poor the Gospel is preached..... 255

SERMON XIV.

RESPECT DUE TO ANTIQUITY.

[Preached at the Assizes at Shrewsbury, 1821.]

JEREMIAH XXXV. 18, 19.

Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you, therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever. 275

SERMON XV.

THE SHIPWRECK OF ST. PAUL.

[Preached at Lincoln's Inn, 1822, and at Madras, 12th March, 1826.]

ACTS xxvii. 23, 24.

PAGE

There stood by me this night the Angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee 298

SERMON XVI.

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818; at Lincoln's Inn, 1822; and at Madras, 1826.]

PHIL. i. 21.

To die is gain 320

SERMON XVII.

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, May 3, 1818; Lincoln's Inn, May 5, 1822; and Madras, Feb. 26, 1826.]

PHIL. i. 21.

To die is gain 335

SERMON XVIII.

ON THE ATONEMENT.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818, and at Cuddalore, 1826.]

ROMANS vi. 3, 4.

PAGE

Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life 352

SERMON XIX.

ON THE ATONEMENT.

[Preached at Lincoln's Inn, May, 1823.]

COLOSS. iii. 3.

Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God..... 375

SERMON I.

TIME AND ETERNITY.

[Preached at Lincoln's Inn, 1823, and at Madras, March 4, 1826.]

2 Cor. iv. 18.

We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

There is an ancient fable told by the Greek and Roman Churches, which, fable as it is, may for its beauty and singularity well deserve to be remembered, that in one of the earliest persecutions to which the Christian world was exposed, seven Christian youths sought concealment in a lonely cave, and there, by God's appointment, fell into a deep and death-like slumber. They slept, the legend runs, two hundred years, till the greater part of mankind had received the faith of the Gospel, and that Church which they had left a poor and afflicted orphan, had "kings" for her "nursing fathers, and queens" for her "nursing mothers."[1] They then at length awoke, and entering into their native Ephesus, so altered now that its streets were altogether unknown to them, they cautiously enquired if there were any Christians in the city? "Chris-

[1] Isaiah xlix. 23.

tians!" was the answer, "we are all Christians here!" and they heard with a thankful joy the change which, since they left the world, had taken place in the opinions of its inhabitants. On one side they were shown a stately fabric adorned with a gilded cross, and dedicated, as they were told, to the worship of their crucified Master; on another, schools for the public exposition of those Gospels, of which so short a time before, the bare profession was proscribed and deadly. But no fear was now to be entertained of those miseries which had encircled the cradle of Christianity; no danger now of the rack, the lions, or the sword; the emperor and his prefects held the same faith with themselves, and all the wealth of the east, and all the valour and authority of the western world were exerted to protect and endow the professors and the teachers of their religion.

But joyful as these tidings must, at first, have been, their further enquiries are said to have met with answers which very deeply surprised and pained them. They learned that the greater part of those who called themselves by the name of Christ, were strangely regardless of the blessings which Christ had bestowed, and of the obligations which He had laid on His followers. They found that, as the world had become Christian, Christianity itself had become worldly; and wearied and sorrowful they besought of God to lay them asleep again, crying out to those who followed them, "you have shewn us many heathens who have given up

their old idolatry without gaining any thing better in its room; many who are of no religion at all; and many with whom the religion of Christ is no more than a cloak of licentiousness; but where, where are the Christians?" And thus they returned to their cave; and there God had compassion on them, releasing them, once for all, from that world for whose reproof their days had been lengthened, and removing their souls to the society of their ancient friends and pastors, the martyrs and saints of an earlier and a better generation.

The admiration of former times is a feeling at first, perhaps, engrafted on our minds by the regrets of those who vainly seek in the evening of life, for the sunny tints which adorned their morning landscape; and who are led to fancy a deterioration in surrounding objects, when the change is in themselves, and the twilight in their own powers of perception. It is probable that, as each age of the individual or the species is subject to its peculiar dangers, so each has its peculiar and compensating advantages; and that the difficulties which, at different periods of the world's duration, have impeded the believer's progress to Heaven, though in appearance infinitely various, are, in amount, very nearly equal. It is probable that no age is without its sufficient share of offences, of judgements, of graces, and of mercies, and that the corrupted nature of mankind was never otherwise than hostile or indifferent to the means which God has employed to remedy its misery. Had we lived

in the times of the infant Church, even amid the blaze of miracle on the one hand, and the chastening fires of persecution on the other, we should have heard, perhaps, no fewer complaints of the cowardice and apostacy, the dissimulation and murmuring inseparable from a continuance of public distress and danger, than we now hear regrets for those days of wholesome affliction, when the mutual love of believers was strengthened by their common danger; when their want of worldly advantages disposed them to regard a release from the world with hope far more than with apprehension, and compelled the Church to cling to her Master's cross alone for comfort and for succour.

Still, however, it is most wonderful, yea rather by this very consideration is our wonder increased at the circumstance, that in any or every age of Christianity such inducements and such menaces as the religion of Christ displays, should be regarded with so much indifference, and postponed for objects so trifling and comparatively worthless. If there were no other difference but that of duration between the happiness of the present life and of the life which is to follow, or though it were allowed us to believe that the enjoyments of earth were, in every other respect, the greater and more desirable of the two, this single consideration of its eternity would prove the wisdom of making Heaven the object of our more earnest care and concern; of retaining its image constantly in our minds; of applying ourselves with a more excellent zeal to every thing

which can help us in its attainment, and of esteeming all things as less than worthless which are set in comparison with its claims, or which stand in the way of its purchase.

Accordingly, this is the motive which St. Paul assigns for a contempt of the sufferings and pleasures, the hopes and fears, of the life which now is, in comparison with the pleasures and sufferings, the fears and hopes, which are, in another life, held out to each of us. And it is a reason which must carry great weight to the mind of every reasonable being, inasmuch as any thing which may end soon, and must end some time or other, is, supposing all other circumstances equal, or even allowing to the temporal good a very large preponderance of pleasure, of exceedingly less value than that which, once attained, is alike safe from accident and decay, the enjoyment of which is neither to be checked by insecurity, nor palled by long possession, but which must continue thenceforth in everlasting and incorruptible blessedness, as surely as God Himself is incorruptible and everlasting. But when, besides this great and preponderating consideration, we recollect the hollow and unsatisfactory nature of all the enjoyments and advantages which the present life can supply; when we recollect how small a share of those enjoyments the generality of mankind can hope for, and that those men who have seemed to fare most plentifully at the feast of worldly happiness, have yet, by their own acknowledgments, arisen from that feast unsatisfied and

disappointed; when we recollect and feel, as we may most of us have felt but too keenly, that these pleasures, short and imperfect as they are, are dashed and mingled with many inevitable sorrows, and when we recollect, above all, that there is nothing in our care of the everlasting world which necessarily or usually interferes with the moderate enjoyment of those short-lived comforts which the present world can supply, it must needs excite no common degree of wonder and pity for the madness of mankind, to behold them so over-anxious and over-busy in their pursuit of the less and less enduring advantages, and so strangely careless and inactive in their endeavours after those glories which abide eternally.

It is plain, when so many reasonable beings in this one instance act unreasonably, that some powerful and prevalent causes must be at work to prevent or pervert the fair exercise of their understandings; and it is evidently most desirable and necessary to discover and remove the delusions which hide from our eyes the things belonging to our peace, which disqualify our spirits from the discernment of spiritual interests, and render our hearts unmoved to any good or effectual purpose by the most gracious promises or the most aweful threatenings of the Almighty. To point out then the causes and, under Divine Grace, the most probable cure of this remarkable confusion of intellect, will be the object of the observations which I shall now suggest to you.

Of these causes, a want of faith is the most obvious, as it is one, I apprehend, of the most frequent, and, of all others, where it prevails, the most fatal. It is impossible that we should please God; it is impossible that we should even desire to please Him, unless we are first assured that *He is*, and that He is a rewarder of all such as diligently seek Him. It is impossible that we should come to Christ, as Christ requires, with an entire and exclusive confidence in His merits, with a hearty and lively thankfulness for His mercies, with an earnest and effectual desire to offer up ourselves, our souls, and bodies, to His reasonable and holy service, unless we are first really persuaded that the Gospel contains the words of God, and that the things are true, and that the objects are answered, which the Lord Jesus is there recorded to have done, and suffered, and undertaken, and purchased for us. It is impossible, lastly, that we should resist the many and mighty temptations with which our spiritual adversary assails us, unless we are convinced of the truth and reasonableness of those passages in the Gospels, the epistles, and the prophecies, which declare a compliance with his enticements to be a state of enmity with the Most High, and which compare, as in the words of my text St. Paul has done, the short continuance and minor importance of such sufferings or pleasures as this life can inflict or bestow, with the wrath of Him who, when He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.

It is in vain to urge, as the ancient teachers of morality were in their ignorance content to do, that the guilty pleasures of this life are so short and so poor as to be unworthy of a wise man's desire, unless we are, in the first place, talking to those who profess the name of wisdom, or unless we can first prove to each individual that, by refusing such pleasures, he will get something more than the barren praise of being wise. It is of little avail to press on his notice that, by these indulgences or pursuits, he renounces the far greater enjoyment of a pure and speculative philosophy, when the sensualist or the ambitious man, (and nine tenths of the world are naturally either ambitious or sensual) may reply that, of worldly gratifications, he takes those which please him best. Nor is it sufficient to point out to his notice the lassitude and disease, the remorse and the danger to which an unbridled indulgence of his criminal desires must, even in this life, expose him. His answer is easy; that he knows how to stop in time; that others who have gone as far in vice as he designs to go, have nevertheless escaped the worst of those penal consequences with which we menace him; or that he is aware he is shortening his days, and means, therefore, to make the most of the days which yet remain to him.

I do not forget, and still less am I inclined for the sake of temporary argument, to suppress my conviction that, even in this life, the cup of the sinner is usually full of bitterness; and that of this

world, separately considered, the virtuous and the wise have the best and fairest portion. But I am convinced that, where the advantages and disadvantages held out on both sides are alike only for a time, the present short-lived enjoyment will generally preponderate over the future short-lived pain; and that we must first persuade the sinner that the things which are not seen, both *are*, and are *eternal*, before he is likely to forego those temporal and unholy, but powerfully seductive pleasures, which, at every step, ensnare his eyes and confuse his understanding.

But as a want of faith is thus fatal to all goodness; so is it a deficiency far more frequent among men than a careless observer would imagine. I do not mean that many are to be found so fearfully abandoned to themselves and to Satan as to maintain, either with their mouths or in their hearts, that there is no God. I do not mean that in a Christian land, and among those who, from their childhood, have been surrounded with the evidences of the truth, and with the association and example of all which is good, or great, or holy, the number is considerable of those who expressly deny the Lord who bought them. But this I do mean, and this is unhappily proved true both by reason and experience, that there is a great difference between not disbelieving what is related in Scripture concerning God and His Son, and actually and habitually believing it; and that many a man has no genuine faith who never in his life either denied or

doubted the Gospel. Believing, it should be recollected, is an act of the mind consequent to attention. We cannot believe that which is not present to our thoughts; we cannot have a habitual faith in God, without habitually retaining His image in our minds as the object of our love and reverence. And when we consider how many men there are who, to all outward appearance, never think of God or His Son at all; and how many more who endeavour to get rid of religious thoughts whenever they arise as unnecessary, untimely, and troublesome; we must allow, I think, that a want of faith is at the bottom of the wicked lives of many professing Christians; that some who, when the Gospel is named to them, are very far from doubting its truth, are yet, during the greatest part of their lives, to all practical purposes, unbelievers; while others who, from time to time, may perhaps believe and tremble, are anxious to make still less the little faith which yet lingers in their bosoms. To these men a voice of most aweful warning is necessary. They should be reminded that the Christian religion must, inevitably, be either false or true; that its falsehood or truth is a question of infinite concernment to them; that the things which are not seen, if such things there really are, are eternal, and that either the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a fraud, and the best and wisest men of all ages since His death have been the dupes of a wild imposture; or else, if it be true, that their lives cannot be right, that their feet are treading the downward way, and their end will

be ruin irretrievable. They should be warned, that not only are sinners of a more enormous guilt and a deeper defilement to "be turned into hell," but that "the people who forget God[1]," are to find a proportionate share in those menaced sufferings; and they should be urged, for the sake of their present comfort here, if not for the sake of their everlasting happiness hereafter, to study the Gospel of Christ and the evidences of His religion, and to ask of God to guide their enquiries aright, and to preserve in their minds evermore the conviction to which those enquiries will lead them. It is thus, and thus only, by a diligent examination of the Scriptures, and by a diligent use of the appointed means of improvement and of grace, that the avowed and the practical unbeliever may be alike enabled to overlook "the things which are seen and are temporal," and to fix a due share of his attention on "the things which are not seen and are eternal."

Another and perhaps a still more common cause of this indifference to eternal things, and this perverseness of intellect which prefers to them the fleeting advantages of this world, is the notion that, for the cares of the other world, whatever may be at some future time their necessity, there is no present occasion or, at least, no immediate and urgent hurry. "The temporal concerns of this life," they reason, "may be inferior in importance to the joys

[1] Psalm ix. 17.

or sorrows of the life which is to come, but such as they are, they are present, and they must be presently attended to; whereas the prospects which religion holds out are certainly future, may perhaps be distant, and may, therefore, safely be deferred till to-morrow, or next month, or next year, or ten years hence, when there will yet be quite sufficient time to arrange our accounts for Heaven, and repent at our leisure of whatever forbidden sweets we have stolen a taste of during our passage through things temporal."

To these men it might be easily and truly answered, that there is no such inevitable and universal opposition as they suppose between an adherence to the duties of Christianity, and the needful cares of the present world; that our religion itself not only permits but enjoins us to unite a diligence in business to a fervour in spirit[1]; and that, if they will make the just deduction from the claims of ambition, of avarice, and of idle amusement, they will find their temporal duties and their real temporal interests consist, for the most part, extremely well with their care for eternal happiness. But to men so infatuated as these, on their own shewing, appear to be; to men who commit their eternity to the chance of a life which any one of ten thousand accidents may, the next moment, bring to an end; who lie down securely on beds which they may change that night for couches of fire, and act as if

[1] Romans xii. 11.

they alone (of all men living) had made a covenant with hell, and could muzzle the jaws of the grave till they were themselves disposed to enter it: to fools like these what argument can be successfully offered? I know no course but to alarm their instinctive fears with examples of early and sudden mortality; to tell them how such an one went to his bed a healthy and a prosperous man, on whose countenance the shadow of death was dark in the morning; how the marriage feast was spread in such a house, and the young bride passed to her chamber, and knew not that the mirth of her friends would soon be changed into sorrow over her grave; of such a neighbour who went forth to the gate of the city, and the crowd trode on him that he died; of these men slain by robbers; of those swallowed up by the sea; of some that fell victims to the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and others whom a fly, a grape-stone, a flint in the path, or a tile from the house-top took away, in the morning of their lives, and the middle of their schemes, and the heat of their blood and their transgressions, without a day, an hour, a moment for reflection or for prayer[1]. They may be told that the repentance and attention to holy things, on which they reckon as so certainly to take place in themselves hereafter, do not depend, even should life be spared them, on their own choice or resolution; that they are the gifts of the Almighty, which He may either grant or with-

[1] Jeremy Taylor's Holy Dying, sect. i.

hold; and that He whose Spirit will not always strive with man, may be so far provoked by their present contumacy as to abandon them henceforward to a reprobate mind, and weary them no more with His mercy and His offers of salvation. And this, if any thing has that power, may induce them while the day of grace yet lasts to have mercy on themselves, to estimate the things which are seen at no more than their proper value, and to pay that attention which is just and reasonable to the unseen things of eternity.

The last cause of this neglect of unseen and eternal things is a confirmed habit of sin. Of the unfortunate persons who are thus tied and bound, it may be said that they have rendered themselves absolutely incapable, without a more than usual share of Divine assistance, of entertaining spiritual thoughts at all, or even of judging of that religion which the Son of God brought down from Heaven. By Christ's own testimony it was needful that a man should do His Father's will, in order that he might learn of the Christian doctrine whether it were true; and we find by daily experience, that he who knows his whole life to be displeasing to God, and yet, from long habit, has neither the power nor the desire to change it, is on this very account indisposed to direct his thoughts either to the joys or to the sorrows of immortality. His affections are of the earth, earthly; the songs of angels and the glories of intellectual existence, have no charms for him; and if the narrow gate of life were even

now expanded wider for his admission, he would only miss and regret the indulgence of his recollected appetites, amid the splendours of God's house and the pure gales of Paradise. Or, shall the terrors of the Lord be urged to him? He trembles like Felix, but like Felix he turns away! He cannot forsake his darling habits, though he already experiences a foretaste of their bitter consequences; and he cries out to God's Spirit, as the evil spirit cried out to God's Son, "art thou come to torment me before the time[1]?"

Of such as these who are now grown old in iniquity, there are some it may be feared who are, humanly speaking, beyond the reach of any help but prayer. But the less hardened it may not be useless to remind of those glorious promises of the Gospel, which hold out hopes of success to them who, even at the eleventh hour, repent and seek forgiveness; to remind them that to forsake their evil habits will be a task the more difficult the longer it is delayed, and that the most rooted habit may yet give way to a steadfast determination of will, to a reasonable retirement from the objects which most enslave them, to hearty and persevering prayer, and to that prevailing help of the Most High, which, where prayer is, will never long be absent.

But of all these victims of delusion, of him who disbelieves or altogether disregards the Gospel, of him who, admitting its truth and its importance, defers its necessary cares to a future and indefinite

[1] St. Matt. viii. 29.

period; of him who is so immersed in sin that he has neither eyes nor affections for the concerns of his soul and the blessings or terrors of Christianity; for all these different symptoms of the same internal weakness and corruption, the cure is, in a great degree, the same. As they all err from a too great attention to the objects which, in the present life, surround them, it should be the endeavour of them all, by attendance on the outward means of instruction and of grace, by a study of the Scriptures, by a participation in the solemn ordinances of religion, by a steady and resolute contemplation of the evidences, the commandments, the promises, and the threatenings of the Gospel, to impress their souls with the comparative littleness of all earthly prospects, and with the constant recollection of that event which is, every moment, approaching nearer to all of us, and which will enable us all, though perhaps too late, to estimate both temporal and eternal things at their real value.

We read of a certain youth in the early days of Christianity, (those periods of historic suffering and heroic patience and legendary wonder to which I have already ventured to call your attention)—we read of a Christian youth on whom his persecutors had put in practice a more than common share of their cruel ingenuity, that by his torments (let those who will, or can, go through the horrible details) they might compel him to deny his Lord and Saviour. After a long endurance of those pains they released him in wonder at his obstinacy. His

Christian brethren are said to have wondered too, and to have asked him by what mighty faith he could so strangely subdue the violence of the fire, as that neither a cry nor a groan escaped him. "It was, indeed, most painful," was the noble youth's reply; "but an angel stood by me when my anguish was at the worst, and with his finger pointed to Heaven." Oh thou, whoever thou art, that art tempted to commit a sin, do thou think on death, and that thought will be an angel to thee! The hope of Heaven will raise thy courage above the fiercest threatenings of the world; the fear of hell will rob its persuasions of their enchantments; and the very extremity of thy trial may itself contribute to animate thy exertions by the thought that the greater thy endurance now, the greater will be thy reward hereafter. The wildest temptation must shortly have an end; the fiercest flame must burn out for want of fuel; the most bitter cup, when drunk to the dregs, will trouble thee no more. These things are temporal, and hasten, while I speak, to pass away; but the hope which is visible to the inward eye of faith is unfading, eternal, heavenly. Bear up, a little while bear up in the cause of immortality! If thy trial is intolerable, it will by so much the sooner have an end. Thy heart may break, but thy good angel points to Heaven, and One, greater than the angels, will, ere long, fulfil His promise, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!"

SERMON II.

ON THE PRESENCE OF GOOD ANGELS.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818, and at Lincoln's Inn.]

2 KINGS vi. 16.

Fear not, for they that be with us *are more than they which be with* them.

IN a war between the kings of Syria and Israel, the prophet Elisha had, on various occasions, given warning to the latter sovereign of the enterprises of his enemy. The plans of the invader being thus repeatedly defeated, he determined to revenge himself on the person whom, with good reason, he apprehended to be the cause of his disasters, and he despatched a body of strong men by night to surprise Elisha in Dothan. Accordingly, the sacred historian informs us, "when the servant of the man of God was risen early and gone forth, behold an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master, how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not, for they that be with *us* are more than they which be with *them*. And Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

The conclusion of the history I need not repeat to you; the use which I now design to make of it is to urge on your attention, first, the nature and certainty of that invisible protection which the Almighty, in this life, affords to those who love and fear Him; and, secondly, the number and power of the heavenly spirits, by whose agency He thus supports and protects them under those necessary evils which His wisdom sends to try and purify them, and against those innumerable dangers which His mercy will not suffer to overwhelm them. Both these doctrines, I apprehend, are implied, if not expressed, in the answer of Elisha to his terrified servant, and in the miracle by which that answer was confirmed. For if God is not accustomed to interfere in the defence of His servants, the presence of the angels, who are God's ministers, could have been no further ground of confidence to the prophet than the height of the neighbouring mountains, and the splendour of the morning sun; and if there were no angels, or if the angels were not the usual ministers of God in such works of mercy and protection, Elisha could not have appealed to their numbers and fiery chariots as his reasons for despising the armies of Syria. The history, therefore, should seem to teach the doctrines of a particular Providence, and of the existence and ministry of angels.

That "the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous," and that "His ears are open to their prayers[1];"

[1] 1 Peter iii. 12.

that He, without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground, regardeth His servants as of more value "than many sparrows[1];" that our times are in His hands, and that, by the promise of deliverance, He hath encouraged us to call on Him in the day of trouble; are doctrines which, in some sense or other, must be admitted by all who admit the inspiration of Scripture; and they are so consistent in themselves with the attributes of God, and so necessary amid the dangers and sufferings of our mortal existence, that if something of the kind were not to be found in Scripture, the omission might be almost enough to make it probable that our religion did not come from God.

Yet it has been the endeavour of many specious reasoners to contract within narrow bounds their acknowledgment of a superintending and directing Providence; to refer all things which are done or endured, either in us or around us, to an impulse given by God, in the first instance, to His creation; or, at most, to a pervading energy whereby the course of events is conducted in an even tenour, and controulled by him to the *general* furtherance of His great designs, and the *general* interests of His creatures. They are content to thank the Almighty for the beauty and harmony of that goodly fabric which His right hand hath builded, and for that knowledge of His own nature, and our eternal expectations, which He hath given us through His Son. They are content to implore (as an acknowledg-

[1] St. Luke xii. 7.

ment of their dependence on Him) the continuance of His general protection, and the accomplishment of His general promises; but they find it hard to believe that any of the separate occurrences of life can proceed from separate and particular interpositions of His power; that His hand is, in any case, immediately exerted to protect or punish individuals; that the arm of a particular enemy is ever weakened; that the stroke of a particular disease is ever interrupted; that individual nakedness is ever clothed, or individual hunger satisfied, by the direct act of His will, or as a definite answer to our petitions.

These things depend, they tell us, on that wheel of events, which, however its issues are at first sight various and infinite, yet, on the whole, and when viewed by the comprehensive glance of a historian or a philosopher, is found to perform its revolutions with an uniformity most mysterious and terrible; of which the machinery is too vast to be discomposed for the sake of such worms as we are, and of which the consequences must, therefore, happen indifferently "to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not[1]." Thus they observe, first, that so close and necessary is the connexion between events and their causes, and so high may this connexion be traced in its ascent to the First Cause of all, it is impossible to

[1] Eccles. ix. 2.

conceive that certain causes should fail to produce certain consequences; that the chain of causes and effects once begun could be interrupted without a miracle; or that any of these, when the first link in the chain was framed, could thenceforward be contingent or uncertain. But it is difficult, they contend, to believe that God should continually or frequently interfere, by miracles, to change an order of events which He has Himself appointed; and it is still more difficult to shew that any of those circumstances which we regard as providential interpositions, have happened without a sufficient natural cause, or in a manner at variance with the natural succession of causes and consequences. It is, therefore, they tell us, most reasonable to suppose, that the Almighty conducts the affairs of men on the same general principles, and with the same undeviating and implacable firmness as He administers the great revolutions of nature; neither repenting Him of His purposes, nor varying His conduct, as one by whom nothing from the beginning was unforeseen, and whose first designs were too nice and perfect to need any future revision.

And this doctrine, they maintain, is remarkably confirmed by the fact that of all the casualties, as we term them, which befal a given number of men, the average amount may be very exactly calculated beforehand, insomuch that it is not only probable, but so nearly certain, as to be the common principle on which many pecuniary speculations are founded, that of so many individuals of a given age,

such a number will, in the course of a year, be attacked by death, disease, or accident; that of so many houses, such a proportion will become a prey to the flames; that of so many vessels, such an amount will perish amid the rage of the elements. "How then can we dream," they exultingly demand, "that our lives or interests are of such importance as that God should, for them, suspend the march of His creation? How dare we pray to be freed from our allotted share of those evils, which, if they do not fall on us, must necessarily be laid as an additional burden on some of our fellow-creatures?"

It is not only the plausibility of these opinions, or their apparent inconsistency with the doctrine implied in my text, which makes me anxious to shew their inherent fallacy. They conduct to so much practical as well as speculative evil, to consequences so impious in themselves, and productive of so much present and future misery to those who adopt them, that this, in itself, may induce a suspicion that the doctrine cannot be true, which, when carried to its full extent, will land us in such conclusions. Of the consequences which result from the denial of a particular Providence, the most evident as well as the most obnoxious, and that which, as we have seen, its supporters are least anxious to conceal, is one, nevertheless, extremely offensive to Christian ears, and extremely contrary to the general tenour of the Gospel. It is, that all prayer for earthly blessings is nothing else than an idle ceremony. It is but in vain that they would make a

distinction between prayer for general and for particular blessings, as if the former could be reasonable subjects of entreaty to the throne of grace, while the latter were vain and impious. A general blessing means, if it means any thing, the aggregate of many particulars; and it is the same thing in effect, since the one is only an abridgment of the other, whether we ask for God's favour and protection simply, or whether we specify in our prayer all the different circumstances in which His favour is exhibited. The advantages or disadvantages of either method of devotion are found in their effect on our own hearts only. It may be wise to exercise ourselves to a sense of our own ignorance and weakness by leaving the detail of our wants to God's all-seeing care, content with such general applications for His help as may ensure to us that help in whatever instance it is most expedient for us. It may be wiser still, and I believe it to be most conformable to the nature of man, and the course recommended in Scripture, to quicken our tardy zeal, and warm our languid piety, by the enumeration of all those things which we most desire or dread at God's hands, submitting ourselves, in each particular, to His Almighty will and wisdom. But, however our prayers may be worded, our desires, if we pray earnestly, must always dwell on those precise instances of blessing or deliverance which are the nearest, for the time, to our hearts. Even in a wish, we cannot separate the general idea of happiness from those component parts for which happiness is only a com-

prehensive term; and it matters not to Him "who knoweth what is in the mind of the spirit," whether our aspirations approach Him in the "groanings which cannot be uttered[1]" of St. Paul, or in the various supplications and deprecations of the longest litany.

It is plain, then, both that a petition merely general is in effect a species of prayer which, however it may have been uttered by the lips, never yet was conceived by the heart of man; and also that, even if it were offered up, it could only be fulfilled by the gift from God of those particular blessings, or the major part of them, which together make up the complex idea of protection or of happiness. If God will not interfere to give us the *items*, it is certain that He will not interfere to give us the *sum*; and if prayer for the particular interposition of Providence is vain and superstitious, we can pass no other censure on the most general application for His favour.

"But prayer may still be well-pleasing to God, as expressive of our dependence on Him." Now here, in the first place, it is not easy to perceive how any unprofitable and unmeaning action can be acceptable to an all-wise and perfect Being. But, secondly, what is meant by our dependence on a Being whom we can neither provoke to our further misery, nor conciliate to our further happiness; who has already, by an irrevocable fiat, stamped the character of our lot in life, and put it beyond His

[1] Romans x. 26.

power to alter our position in the world, except, which it would be impious to look for, at the expense of His own consistency? Dependence involves in itself the notion of contingency. Whatever is determined, is, in a certain sense, already past, and the past may be the subject of gratitude or sorrow, but is placed beyond the reach of hope or anxiety.

But it is not for earthly blessings alone that prayer is rendered vain by the doctrine which I am now considering. It is not a temporal fatalism only which follows from denying that the events of this life are influenced by a particular Providence.

In this span of earthly being we might endure to take our chance of happiness or misery, content to bear our allotted burthen without a murmur or a prayer, if the world to come were free from the inexorable rule of destiny, and if it depended on ourselves so to pass through the present valley of tears, as to secure the hope of future and eternal felicity. But how (if our worldly and physical visitations be regarded as the result of an unalterable chain of causes and consequences) how can the human will or the moral actions or habits of mankind be exempted from the same necessity? Are not they links in the same chain? Are not our moral characters frequently influenced by external occurrences? Do they not often produce, in their turn, an effect on the external circumstances of ourselves, and of those around us? Of those casualties of which the regular and computed recurrence has been advanced as an argument to show their fatality, can we for-

get that a great, perhaps the greatest, proportion have their origin in some voluntary action or habit of individuals? It is not the fire of Heaven, it is not the rage of elements, which our houses or our ships have only to apprehend, but the carelessness of intoxication, the malice of the incendiary, the armed violence of the pirate or mutineer. Of deaths, too, (and out of every number of deaths which the calculation of the ensurer anticipates, how many may be named which do not proceed from the decay or diseases of nature, or from the natural, though mortal dangers which hover in every breeze and lurk in every thicket?) how many are there which may be traced to guilty violence, or to equally guilty indulgence, to the actions of our enemies, our progenitors, or ourselves, actions for which they or we are one day to render a most strict account, and for which, according to their atrocity, or to the repentance and faith with which they have been followed, the Judge of men and angels will exact a less or greater punishment? But if the circumstances of life by which the moral habits of man are formed, if the accidents of life to which these moral habits give occasion, if these are the results of a blind and capricious fate, or of a pre-determined and inevitable arrangement, is it not certain that the intervening link must also be fixed in the chain; that there must be a certain and necessary amount of moral guilt and virtue among mankind, which cannot be increased or diminished by us, and that it is as vain in man to

endeavour to reform the world or himself, as it would be unjust in him to seek to be freed from that lot of vice which, if he did not bear it, must be transferred to some of his fellow-sufferers? But though these horrible consequences are admitted without scruple or qualification by the sturdier class of fatalists, the bare enunciation of them may be thought sufficient with rational deists, to prove that doctrines cannot be true which are so inconsistent with all we believe or know of God, of ourselves, and our future destiny.

Still it may be urged (not, surely, by those zealots of the unitarian school who deny the ordinary help of God's Spirit, nor by those followers of Augustin and Calvin who ascribe the gifts of the Holy Ghost, like all other good gifts, to a previous and unalterable purpose of God) it may be urged by some that, allowing the course of nature to be bound by fate, the human will may still be free, and that the soul of man may be so influenced and assisted by the gracious inspiration of the Most High, as to rise superior to the chances and changes of the world, and even convert to his spiritual aliment those trials and temptations which appear, at first sight, most formidable to his virtue. But they who thus distinguish between a material and spiritual destiny, have surely forgotten the continual influence exerted, not only by external circumstances on the will of man, but by the will of man on external circumstances. If man has freedom of choice at all, the actions consequent on such choice, and

the effects of those actions on things around him, must depend on that choice alone, and have no connexion whatever with the events which preceded it. If God's grace, by which that choice is influenced, be a contingent, not a predestinated blessing, we admit at once an immediate interposing cause, which experience proves to have power to determine to the greatest extent, the temporal as well as the eternal happiness of individuals and communities. In the one case the chain of causes and events is cut short never to be re-united; in the other, we have a stone hewn without hands, which must dash to pieces the complicated and gigantic idol of destiny, and scatter its iron, its clay, its brass, its silver, and its gold, "like the chaff of the summer threshing floor which the wind carried away, that no place was found for them[1]." There can be no qualifications of fatalism; the whole vast bubble bursts if we impugn it in any one particular, while if we contend for any part of it, all moral obligations fall to the ground, and we must make our option in theology between admitting the existence of a power superior to the Almighty, or divesting the All-good of His noblest attributes of justice and mercy.

With good reason, then, have the great majority of rational theists, in every age and country, agreed to recognise, in the course of events around them, no other agency than the Providence of the Most High, applied to particulars; a Providence which He exerts, indeed, in its grander features, according

[1] Dan. ii. 35.

to an uniform system, but which (in its detail and minuter circumstances) He may and does continually and infinitely vary, according to the necessities, the exertions, the merits, and the prayers of His creatures.

For it is not a doctrine of revealed religion only, that God is the moral as well as the physical Governor of the world, and that the course of events is so arranged by Him, as, even in the present life, to promote the interests of virtue, to cross the schemes of impiety, to consult the happiness, and to be influenced by the prayers of the righteous and the penitent. This has been the hope, this the faith, this the fear, this the religion of every nation, how rude soever, by whom, under whatever name, the Almighty has been named, or His altars, with whatever worship, honoured. True it is that they have not supposed in this world a perfect retribution, or anticipated an exact adjustment of earthly good or evil, according to the virtues or the demerits of individuals. This they have believed to be reserved to a future stage of being, in which the inequalities of the present life were to be redressed, and the good rewarded richly for their patient endurance of those calamities which had been, for wise ends, imposed on them. But that, even in the present world, impiety and oppression were sometimes exemplarily punished; that, in this valley of tears and darkness, the virtuous were sometimes exemplarily delivered and supported; that prayer might conciliate, and repentance appease, and virtue secure the favour of the Sovereign ruler of events and

their causes, are opinions coeval and coextensive with a belief in God's being at all, or only lost amid those miserable savages to whom the difficulties of procuring subsistence have left no time for meditation, and who, in the pressing wants of the passing day, have ceased to regard the invisible world with hope or apprehension.

Where the idea of God is admitted at all, it is hard, indeed, to represent to ourselves a God who is indifferent to the distresses or the conduct of His creatures; and the possibility of such a divinity was conceived by Epicurus only, when he had divested him of his character as Creator. A mere bystander may, indeed, be supposed to retire into the unapproachable recesses of an unmoved and happy immortality; he may avert his eyes from the vast and disfigured scene of blood and misery to some happier spot, if such is to be found, of comparative peace and virtue[1].

But though the bystander might enjoy his own quiet amid the wretchedness of nations, the parent may be naturally expected to feel for his children's wants, and to hear his children's petitions. The same instinct which inclines us to watch over the welfare of our own little ones, that instinct leads us

[1] Τοὺς μὲν ἔα παρὰ νηῦσι πόνον τ' ἐχέμεν καὶ ὀϊζὺν
Νωλεμέως· αὐτὸς δὲ πάλιν τρέπεν ὅσσε φαεινὼ
Νόσφιν ἐφ' ἱπποπόλων Θρηκῶν καθορώμενος αἶαν
Μυσῶν τ' ἀγκεμάχων, καὶ ἀγαυῶν Ἱππημολγῶν
Γλακτοφάγων, Ἀβίων τε, δικαιοτάτων ἀνθρώπων.
Hom. Il. N. 2.

to expect relief from our unseen Father when, in bitterness of heart, we call on Him; and there are times of mental calamity in which, even if prayer were useless, or even sinful, it would be next to impossible to abstain from it. Nor do I know a greater presumptive proof of the reasonableness of any practice, or any expectation, than its universal reception among mankind, its entire conformity with our natural wants and feelings, and that it belongs to the number of those primary tenets, those ἐννοίαι, which, if not born with us, yet necessarily and speedily arise within us from the constitution of our nature and the disposition of things around us.

Nor is this opinion really at variance with the facts alleged against it, or with the degree of regularity found in the recurrence of those dispensations which, by storing the experience, assist the foresight of the calculator. That regularity, such as it is, depends not only on the natural exhaustion of the human body, on the natural phenomena of the earth, the water, and the air, but still more on the continuance of a certain state of civil society, on the civil tranquillity or moral habits of a people, on the facilities afforded, or the barriers opposed, to crime, and on the degree in which that indigence, which often leads to crime, is alleviated or prevented. Accordingly, to two nations or two periods of society differing in these respects from each other, the same calculation will not apply. A very different ratio of casualties belongs to Norway and to

France, as well as to France during the rage of revolution, and France during its previous tranquillity. The ensurer must reform his tables if he carries them from England into Turkey, and in England itself a difference, notoriously springing from moral causes, has arisen within the present age in the average of longevity.

But, further, it being granted that the moral and religious habits of a nation exert an influence over the casualties to which the individuals of that nation are exposed, it is plain that there are two ways in which the manner of that influence may be stated; and that it is as allowable in the assertor of a peculiar Providence to say, that God gives health and prosperity to the virtuous, as it is for his opponent to explain the whole phenomena by the physical effects of temperance and industry. Nor will the regularity with which these dispensations succeed each other have power to surprise the believer who reflects that, while the morals and religion of a country are stationary, an equal number of crimes will call down an equal number of chastisements, and that the same prayers may generally receive the same answers from the God who "maketh a fruitful land barren for the wickedness of them that dwell therein," and who hath promised to "hear in Heaven, His dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways[1]."

[1] Psalm cvii. 34. 1 Kings viii. 39.

For that the Christian is encouraged thus to speak of God, and thus to look up, in every dispensation of mortality, to the immediate hand of a presiding and pervading Providence, is plain, not only from the example of Elisha in Dothan, but from very many texts of universal application in which this doctrine is expressed or implied. Implied it is, indeed, in every passage of Scripture which inculcates the duty and efficacy of prayer either for spiritual or, still more, for temporal blessings. For, as prayer would be vain and presumptuous unless God may be thereby induced to grant what He would otherwise have withheld from us, so, as prayer is recommended and enjoined, we may be sure it is neither presumptuous nor vain, and that, when we ask for daily bread, for peace, for deliverance from sickness or from danger, for the welfare of our friends, of our nation, or of our governors, or for any other of those particular blessings which we are encouraged in Scripture to seek from the bounty of the Most High, we ask for that, our obtaining of which depends on an act of His will, and which He is the more inclined to bestow on us in consequence of such our petitions: nor is more required to show that the world is not a machine, but a kingdom, in which events do not blindly or necessarily succeed each other, but rational agents are governed and rewarded by Him who is Himself Reason and Wisdom, whose eyes follow us, whose hand holds us, whose Spirit lives within us, but who re-

gards with a very different eye, and governs with a very different sceptre, the children of His love, and those whose ways are perverse before Him.

Still, however, it will be said that experience is against the doctrine; that strong as these expressions are, and plausible as is the system which we build on them, the truth still is that in this world there is no visible difference made between the righteous and the wicked; that injustice often triumphs; that innocence is often depressed; that the servants of God, so far from having less, are directed by Christ Himself to prepare for more than their share of certain species of affliction; insomuch that a prosperous condition in this life is made an unfavourable symptom of our spiritual state, and we are expressly told, that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth[1]."

I answer that, to the first part of this objection the second is, in itself, a sufficient reply, inasmuch as admitting, in its fullest extent, the fact that the righteous are, in this world, often miserable, yet would this fact be reconciled to the doctrine of an especial Providence, by the knowledge that these sufferings are not casual or fatal, but chastisements inflicted by a wise and tender Parent. The presence and care of the physician is as surely recognised in the severest inflictions of his skill, as in the anodyne or in the cordial; the mercy of God was as surely displayed when the vanity of St. Paul was

[1] Heb. xii. 6.

reproved by the buffetings of Satan, as when the same apostle was saved from the waves of Melita, or upborne by the Spirit above the regions of mortality to catch the triumphal hymn, and behold the ineffable glories of angels and saints in Paradise. Nor is more promised to the most illustrious of God's favourites, nor can more be reasonably desired by a passenger through the wilderness of the present life, than that such afflictions, and such only, shall visit him, as have a tendency to expedite his journey, and that so much, and no more, of temporal happiness shall be afforded him as is consistent with the far nobler prospects of eternity. Still less have the righteous cause to distrust the care, or murmur against the justice of Providence, when they behold, with David, the wicked in outward prosperity, or the enemies of God exalted to a power of oppressing and insulting His servants. Why should we envy another those advantages which God only withholds from ourselves because He knows them to be inexpedient for us? Or how can we forget that even the wicked, in the stations where God has placed them, are no more than the blind executioners of His will, and, therefore, only tolerated as instruments of unintended good, or of needful correction to those whom the Almighty favours? Or shall we grudge the tares their rain and sunshine, when we know that these tares are allowed to stand in mercy to the wheat which is mingled with them? Or shall we not rather make it the subject of our hope and our intercession, that

the bounties showered on them, and the afflictions which we complain of, may be medicines alike, though medicines of a different character, to the healing of their sickness and our own?

It is further to be recollected that the outward signs of happiness and prosperity are often, to the last degree, deceitful; that there are rods in God's hands which have power to make the ambitious person wretched on a throne, to cause the voluptuary to eat his feast in bitterness of heart, and the miser to weep over his accumulated treasure. "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men; a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth; yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it; this is vanity, and it is an evil disease[1]." And, omitting that still small voice of conscience which alone was accounted sufficient by the sages of antiquity, to incline the balance of worldly happiness to the side of virtue, yet, if the absence of worldly care, if constant and useful occupation, if the love and veneration of the truly wise and good, and the buoyant sense of successful resistance to persecution be indeed pleasurable sensations, who shall say that Paul was not far happier in his bonds than Nero on his golden bed, or than that Felix who trembled on his judgement-seat? In point of external circumstances the apostles of Christ were indeed

[1] Eccles. vi. 1, 2.

of all men most miserable; but that their employment and situation afforded them many compensating enjoyments, may be apprehended not only from the reason of the case, but from the promise of their omniscient Master, that whosoever had abandoned houses and lands, and wife and children, for his name's sake, should receive manifold more of blessing in the present life, as well as in that life everlasting, where his toils were finally to be rewarded[1].

But after all, with the exception of some peculiar dispensations, it will be by no means easy to show, on any grounds of Scripture or experience, that the balance of good and evil is, in this life, unfavourable to the virtuous even in those outward gifts of Providence, in which, till they are tried, it is natural for flesh and blood to look for happiness. Perfect bliss, indeed, is not to be found below; and even if bliss unalloyed were the promised reward of virtue, I know not where we should seek for that perfect virtue which could claim it. But is it really true that, in the ordinary dispensations of Providence, no advantage is given to virtue? Why then does every instance of successful vice, or virtue oppressed, excite not only our murmurs, but our astonishment? On what principle but that of experience could the heathen orator pronounce it impossible for the impious and perjured man to found a lasting empire? Or was it not an inspired experience which led the

[1] St. Matt. xix. 29.

Psalmist to declare that, in the course of a long life, he had never seen the righteous forsaken? Perfect felicity, I repeat, is given to none; and that definite felicity, which arises from wealth and power, is no where promised to God's children. But the promise is most blessed which, without determining the exact share of temporal advantages which may fall to them, assures them, in every state of life, of support, of comfort and protection, and so much, and no more, of worldly happiness or worldly sufferings, as He who loves them best, and knows them best, perceives to be most for their advantage.

It yet remains for me to discuss the nature and number of those spirits, by whose agency, as disclosed in my text, the Almighty interposes in the defence and assistance of His servants. This will be the subject of a future sermon. But I cannot conclude my present discourse without shortly calling your attention to the practical results which flow from the doctrine of a particular Providence, in the hope that God may bless their consideration to our holiness here, and our everlasting happiness hereafter.

In the first place, few considerations are more full of comfort, or more apt to excite in us an unbounded gratitude and veneration, than the knowledge that the events of life are not administered by blind chance or inexorable destiny, but by the immediate superintendence of the wisest and best of Beings, by whom our wants are known, by whom our prayers are heard, by whom our exertions after hap-

piness are rendered efficacious and successful, who "careth for those who cast their cares upon Him," and makes "all things work together for good to those who love" Him. Verily "the Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of isles be glad thereof." "We give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power, and hast reigned[1]."

Secondly, it must shew how greatly godliness has the advantage in this world as well as in the world to come, if we consider that, as neither good nor evil is dispensed to mankind at random, so if we are fit for good, good will come to us; while if we are ready to faint under the gracious chastisement of God, the surest way to obtain relief is, by the diligent amendment of our lives, to render that chastisement unnecessary. Nor can a stronger inducement be found to think humbly of our own success in life, and charitably of the failures of other men, than the assurance that both they and we can only so far succeed as God has determined for us, and that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy[2]."

And, lastly, when we accustom ourselves to look up to God as His daily and hourly pensioners, and to ascribe whatever we receive or obtain to His bounteous and only dispensation, we may learn to look on prayer not only as a duty but a privilege, and to

[1] 1 St. Pet. v. 7. Rom. viii. 28. Psalm xcvii. 1. Rev. xi. 17.

[2] Romans ix. 16.

apply to His throne for the good things which we desire from Him, with as much earnestness and regularity as we now betake ourselves to the outward and ordinary means of obtaining the gratification of our wishes. Yea more, with this pervading and abiding sense of God's infinite presence and power, the necessary pursuits of the present life will, themselves, become devotional, as we go forth to our toil, and commence our studies in His name from whom every good gift proceeds, and consecrate to His service whatever increase He shall bestow of knowledge, or renown, or prosperity!

SERMON III.

ON THE MINISTRY OF GOOD ANGELS.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818, and at Lincoln's Inn.]

2 KINGS vi. 16.

Fear not! for they that be with us, *are more than they which are with* them.

WE are now arrived at the second branch of the enquiry which these words have suggested, the existence, namely, and the number of those invisible beings, by whose agency the Almighty (as in the case of the prophet Elisha) protects or consoles His servants.

For that they were spiritual and celestial guards to whose presence Elisha thus referred, and on whose power and numbers he reposed his hope of safety is plain, both from the reason of his words themselves, and from the miracle by which those words were corroborated, when the eyes of his attendant were so purged from the film of mortality as to behold those terrific ranks, whose chariots thronged the mount, and interposed their burning wheels between the prophet and his Syrian enemies. But though the literal and obvious sense of the words is thus undoubted, a question has still been

raised whether the expression of Elisha is not capable of a figurative meaning; whether by the angels who are thus said, in Scripture, to encamp around the righteous, any thing more is intended than to express, in lively colours and imagery familiar to eastern eloquence, the ever-watchful care and ever-ready help of Providence; or at most those powers of the material world which are wielded by the immediate and invisible sway of Him, who "maketh the winds His messengers," in whose cause the heavenly bodies "in their courses fight together," and to whose call "the lightenings answer." The "famine," "the pestilence," and "the sword," are apostrophized and personified as His servants in the same glowing flights of oratory; and His glory is said to be proclaimed, and His praises sung by "the deep," "the mountains," "the corn-fields," and the "morning-stars." We know what is meant when Minerva reminds Achilles of that which his own reason might well have suggested to him; and the prudence of Jacob, and the blessing which the Almighty bestowed on his labours might, with equal propriety, be described in the sacred volume as "the angel" which led him by the way, and delivered him in all his troubles. There are instances in the Apocalyptic visions where the mortal protectors of the Church, or the mortal invaders of the Roman empire are supposed to be allegorically described as angels engaged in the execution of God's judgements. The plagues and diseases which befel the Egyptians, are spoken of by the Psalmist as

" evil angels sent among them[1];" and a very little extension of the same principle may lead us to suppose that no more was meant by the words of Elisha than to express his confidence in that divine protection which, in fact, did not preserve him by the shields and spears of any celestial guards, but by blinding the eyes and confusing the understanding of the Syrians sent to surprise him.

" Why, indeed," it has been further asked, " should such intermediate agents be employed by a God who is omnipresent and almighty? It is only the imperfection and weakness of earthly monarchs which are disguised by the flimsy veil of solemn and ceremonious attendance, and which compel them to receive their information or accomplish their designs through the eyes and hands of others. But how different is the case with Him who beholds, and embraces, and pervades, and sustains the universe; and how superfluous does it seem to crowd the court of Heaven with these unmeaning pageants, whose praises and homage can confer no honour on Him from whom all things are derived; whose swiftness is idle with Him from whom nothing can escape, and whose fiery chariots are but an empty show in His presence who need but withhold His breath to reduce His enemies to their original nothing! It is more reasonable then," they tell us, " and more reverential towards the Almighty, to give an allegorical interpretation to

[1] Psalm lxxviii. 49.

passages which are very susceptible of it, rather than to ascribe to Him, in reality, those appendages of a mortal king which, however they were adapted to the prejudices of a wild and ignorant race, are inconsistent with the more enlarged ideas which Christians should entertain of His nature."

Even "those visions of angels" to men, which are so frequently recorded in the Sacred Volume, are treated with as little ceremony by these intrepid reasoners, as the words of God's prophets, and of His Son. "They were condescensions," they tell us, "to the prejudices and weaknesses of mankind; a part of those paraphernalia of an earthly potentate which it pleased God to assume in His intercourse with the Jewish people, and no more to be received as real existences than the sapphire pavement and crystal canopy of His throne, and the wheels full of eyes on which Ezekiel beheld Him drawn by cherubims. In all these appearances there are many things," they proceed, "which even the warmest advocates of the literal interpretation must admit to be illusions only. Even if angels exist, and are such as we believe them to be, there are few who suppose that spirits are attired in such white and flowing robes as they have presented to the eyes of mortals, that they are furnished, according to the occupations in which they are engaged, with harps, or ink-horns, or slaughter-weapons, or that they keep guard, in the array of ancient warriors, with chariots and horses of material fire at the doors of God's distinguished

servants. But if these circumstances are illusive, how much remains which is to be accounted real? Or where is the difficulty in supposing that (as God, in such particulars, avowedly condescends to the imperfection of His creatures) so the forms themselves, to which this attire belongs, may be no more than splendid phantoms employed by God to impress on the mind of the beholder a sense of His power, His presence, or His protection; but phantoms still, not real and intelligent personages, and without habitation or existence except in the imagination of those whom God has been thus pleased to visit or enlighten."

Opinions like these were, most probably, entertained by the ancient Sadducees, who could, in no other way that I am aware of, make their denial of angels accord with the authority of the books of Moses. From some passages in the Leviathan they seem to have been revived by Hobbes, and they have since been advanced by Dr. Priestly, though I do not know whether they have made any considerable progress among his adherents. To all such doctrines a sufficient answer might, perhaps, be obtained by a reference to those arguments for the literal in preference to the allegorical sense of Scripture which I have, on former occasions[1], presumed to offer to your notice. But as the objection is of that popular class which may attract the notice of many who have neither leisure nor inclination to

[1] Bampton Lectures, 1814.

investigate the general principles of allegory and metaphor, I am unwilling that the particular difficulty should pass without a particular reply.

The question, indeed, is one of far less practical importance than the admission or denial of providential interposition. If the arm of God is, in any form, extended over His servants, it may seem to signify but little whether He protects us by His own immediate fiat, or by the agency of glorious spirits always at hand to work His will, and guided by His good pleasure only. But nothing can be really unimportant which our Heavenly Father has thought fit to reveal to us concerning the manner and machinery of His providence; and so many valuable lessons of instruction and comfort may be derived by Christians from the consideration of our angelic allies and fellow-servants, that it would ill become us to give place, in such an article of faith, to the unreasonable scepticism of those who, while they cling to the name of Christianity, seem anxious to prune away from the common creed, whatever Christian doctrine transcends the limits of earthly experience, or distinguishes the faith delivered to the Saints from the imperfect elements of natural deism.

It is, in the first place, allowed on all sides, that the allusions to angels as existing, and the express or implicit assertions of their existence and agency, are, in the Sacred Volume, extremely numerous and forcible. There are, indeed, not much less than a hundred passages in the Old and New Tes-

taments where angels are either spoken of as real and active creatures, and servants of the Most High, or where they are actually described as having appeared to mortals, not in dreams or prophetic visions, (for these I would not urge too strongly but openly,) and to the waking eyes of many persons together.

Now, of the texts which assert or imply their existence, there are many which cannot, without the greatest violence to the propriety of language, be regarded as rhetorical figures. When Daniel expressed his conviction that "God had sent his angel to stop the lions' mouths[1]," is it likely that he would have said this to a heathen sovereign, had he not believed in the reality of such a mission? When the Psalmist speaks of man as "made a little lower than the angels[2]", could he mean that a real existence is at all inferior to a phantom? or a rational being to the accidents of the material world, however figuratively described, or however providentially directed? Is it of a band of shadows, a troop of rhetorical ornaments, that Christ is said to be made the head? Or can accidents desire to look into the mysteries of the Gospel? Are they nonentities to which, in the world to come, the righteous are to be made equal? Or would Christ and His apostles, in describing the most solemn event in which the human race can be interested, have so luxuriated in superfluous imagery as to enumerate the angels among the agents concerned in

[1] Dan. vi. 22. [2] Psalm viii. 5.

the day of judgement, if the belief in angels be an error? Let us pause, in God's name, before we thus degrade the Holy Scriptures into one interminable allegory, or, in the name of common sense, let us, at least, place the controversy on its proper footing, and, if the doctrine in question be really absurd or impossible, let us abandon, as an imposture, the religion which so authoritatively declares it.

For let it not be pretended that the conventional use of language has, in these respects, been changed by the encroachments of later superstition; that terms which were familiarly employed and understood by the ancients as rhetorical and figurative only, have since been erroneously received in a literal sense among those platonic Jews or Christians, by whom the venerable stream of truth has been troubled and polluted in its middle channel. It would, in the first place, have been not unreasonable to expect that, in an inspired discourse, no metaphor would have been adopted, which was calculated, in the times immediately succeeding its delivery, to afford a reasonable ground for pervading and universal error. But, secondly, so long as we can trace the opinions of the ancient Jews at all, we know that the word angel or spirit must have conveyed to their ears precisely the same meaning which it now conveys to ours; and that, if the opinion be erroneous, no method could have been devised more effectual for the propagation and perpetuation of error than that which the authors of Scripture have, in this instance, followed.

Nor can it be said that it was an error so harmless in its consequences as to be left by God to find its level in the gradual progress of the human mind, and in the eventual triumph of those philosophical interpretations with which it is the boast of our antagonists to have illustrated the Sacred Volume. However blameless and comfortable in itself, and in its necessary results, the doctrine of intermediate spirits is prone to abuses of the most mischievous character. It has been made in every age and country the main spring and parent of idolatry, from the schamanism of Siberia, to the polytheism of Greece and Rome, and the more modern but not more excusable superstitions of the Romish Christians. Two-thirds of the Old Testament are taken up with endeavours to reclaim the people to whom it was addressed from the superstitious reverence of creatures; and it has been ingeniously suggested by Chrysostom and Athanasius, that Moses has omitted to describe the creation of angels, lest the splendours of such a theogony should have tended to confirm his countrymen in the homage which they were too prone to pay to the spirits of the air, and the host of heaven [1].

But if Moses spake less of the angels than he otherwise might have done, to avoid giving a handle to idolatry, would he not, *a fortiori*, if the angels had been fabulous, have avoided the mention of them at all? Would it not have been a stronger

[1] Chrysost. l. Hom. in Gen. tom. i. p. 81. Athanas. Quest. iv. ad Antioch, tom. iii. p. 333.

argument than any which he has advanced against the worship of the host of Heaven, if he had assured his followers that no such host as they dreamed of existed? Was it not as easy for Elisha to express his trust in the general providence and protection of God, as to employ expressions obviously calculated to promote a popular error, and then to pray for a miracle by which that error might be confirmed? It was a sublime expression of Mohammed, (whether prompted by a lofty enthusiasm, or by a deep and daring hypocrisy) when reminded by Abubeker, in the cave of Thor, that they were only two against a multitude: "There is a third with us, even God." But how different is this from the words of Jehovah's prophet, and from that vision of fiery warriors to which *he* appealed, in proof that more were on his side than against him?

But it is at the tribunal of human reason that the doctrine of angels is next arraigned; and even here the orthodox Christian has no cause to decline the contest. It will, in the first place, indeed, be readily allowed that neither the existence nor the services of angels can be, in the smallest degree, needful to the felicity or the providence of the Infinitely Wise and Mighty; but it is a very weak and faulty inference which proceeds to tell us, that because He does not need, He, therefore, has not created, and will not employ them. "Deus," in the language of the schools, "non ope indiget ullius creaturæ." But who will, therefore, deny that the works of God are manifold and wonderful, and that from all His

reasonable creatures He requires rational praise and duty[1]?

Nor since, in by far the greater part of those daily dispensations of His providence of which we can trace the progress, and of which we are ourselves, in no small degree, the instruments; since, in all these, the wisdom or the folly of mankind are advisedly or blindly agents for the accomplishment of His will, can it be inconsistent to apprehend that the invisible things of His creation may be in like manner administered, under Himself, by beings adapted for such an office, and that many of the events of life, and many of the phenomena of nature may be produced by hands which we cannot see, and labours which, as He directs, He can only appreciate.

That there may be countless rational creatures in the universe besides mankind, and superior in happiness and intellect to man in his present condition, will be hardly denied by those who recollect how very small a portion of that universe is occupied by man, and who believe that man himself has reason to anticipate a removal after death into a higher order of existence. It is surely not unreasonable in man, thus circumstanced, to conjecture that the happiness which he hopes for himself is not without a precedent in the works of his Heavenly Benefactor; that other beings, whether at

1 Οὐ δεῖται, says Theodoret, τῶν ὑμνούντων ὁ Δεσπότης Θεός,—δι' ἀγαθότητα δὲ μόνην καὶ ἀγγέλοις καὶ Ἀρχαγγέλοις καὶ πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει τὸ εἶναι δεδώρηται.—Theod. Quæst. IV. in Genes.

first so framed by Infinite Love, or admitted to such privileges after a previous state of trial, are, even now, in the situation to which we aspire, our elder brethren in immortality, and that a part of their happiness may consist in those habits which are, of all others, most proper to constitute the felicity of a reasonable creature, in expressing their gratitude to the common Parent of all, and in works of love and mercy to us who are as yet their inferiors. But this, in few words, is all which we believe of angels, and this is precisely the degree of information which the Scriptures communicate respecting them.

To the objection which arises from the forms and circumstances under which those angels have appeared who have revealed themselves to mortal eyes, it would be, perhaps, enough to answer, that as we know nothing, or next to nothing, of the nature of these celestial strangers, it is impossible for us to determine whether they are devoid of any appropriate form, or what form or ornaments may best become their situation. But though we should allow, as is most probable, that the white robes and fiery armour of the seraphim are assumed as condescensions to the weakness of mankind, and no less illusive than the apparatus of mortal majesty and dominion through which, in the visions of His prophets, the Almighty Himself has shadowed His unapproachable glories, yet in the one case as reasonably as in the other, a substratum of reality may be insisted on. Our antagonists will not deny, that

it was the true and living God who, from His bright and overshadowing cloud, bore testimony to His beloved Son on the mount of transfiguration. Yet God is no more like a cloud than His attendants are like mortal warriors; and He who, in the first instance, has seen fit to "make His angels spirits," may, with equal propriety, send them forth on a worthy occasion under the likeness of "flaming fire[1]."

As, indeed, I am disputing with those who profess themselves Christians, and who, though they suppose the angels who have appeared to be illusions, yet acknowledge them to be illusions sent by God, and intended as proofs of His presence and protection; I would ask them what they mean by an illusion sent from God, through which God speaks His will to mankind, and yet which is an illusion only, and not personally distinct from God. Is not this God Himself assuming a particular form, declaring, in the likeness of a cloud, a fire, a man in long linen garments, or a being with six wings, and four faces, His power and His gracious pleasure? But whence comes it, then, that the persons thus described have spoken of themselves as "sent" by God, as acting under God's authority, as His servants, yea, and the fellow-servants of them "that have the testimony of Jesus[2]? There are those, indeed, but they do not fall within the list of created nature, there are those to whom the name

[1] Psalm civ. 4. [2] Rev. xix. 10.

both of angel and God may be applied with equal propriety. And when the Word of God, the Angel of the Covenant, appeared in the bush to Moses, and to Abraham under the oak of Mamre [1], how different were His claims to reverence, and how much greater His tone of authority than those ordinary messengers of Heaven dared assume; who are sent forth to minister to the meaner heirs of salvation. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet," said the Vision in Horeb, "for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground [2]." "See thou do it not," were the words of the angel when St. John bowed down before him, "I am thy fellow-servant; worship God [3]." But if this last were God, what higher name than God shall we find out for the former, or, if both were the same Being differently manifested, wherefore so great a distinction between the honours which were at these different times to be paid to Him?

The meaning then of Scripture in these passages, its obvious and only meaning, is established, I trust, beyond the reach of cavil. That this meaning is consistent with the attributes of God, the analogy of His creation, and the course of His providence in those things which are objects of our daily experience, may be regarded as also proved. And no reason remains why professed believers in Christianity should not consider the doctrine as certain,

[1] Gen. xviii. 1. Exod. iii. 2. [2] Exod. iii. 5.
[3] Rev. xxii. 9.

and proceed to enquire, with the caution and reverence which such investigations demand, what that is which is communicated to us in Scripture concerning the power, the numbers, and the ministry of these blessed and immortal creatures.

The power of God's angels might have been reasonably presumed to be great, even if we knew no more of them than their dignity, their immortality, and their invisibility. Of those who are placed, comparatively, so near to the fountain head of Might and Majesty, who stand in the presence of God as ministers to execute His commands, we are naturally inclined to form a high and reverential opinion, as the first fruits and flowers of creation, and the most adorned with every gift which the Author of good things dispenses to the objects of His favour. Concentrating in their minds the experience of many thousand years, we may conceive them darting from their high vantage ground a comprehensive glance through all the kingdoms of nature, understanding, so far as a finite being can understand, the ways of that Providence of which they are in part the agents, and in God's own strength, and the might of His name, unwearied and irresistible, planting their footsteps in the deep, and in the clouds fulfilling His word. In the very notion, indeed, of an invisible power, there is something which affords a very aweful subject of meditation, and which (like to the mechanical effect produced on the mind by darkness) affects us with an impression of reverence not unmixed with fear. The strength

which we cannot appreciate, the blows of which we cannot parry, and which may wound without our distinguishing the hand that smote us, is from this very obscurity more dreaded and, in itself, more formidable. Nor when we reflect on the possibility of our being surrounded by evil as well as invisible agents, can we fail to appreciate the value of such defenders as are fully able, in God's name, to protect us from spiritual malice, and to thank Him that there are not only mightier but more on our side than against us.

But it is not on conjecture only that we are authorised to build this opinion. They are likened in Scripture to fire for their purity, their swiftness, and their formidable power. "The mighty," "the kings," "the angels which excel in strength," are among the titles most frequently given to them; and, above all, more than a single passage may be found where they are called by the still more aweful and extraordinary name of "the gods;" אלהים.

That their numbers are great might have been inferred from the single fact of that mighty army which was assembled on the hill of Dothan. But here also we have express testimony, in the word of God, to the twenty thousand angelic chariots whom the inspired poet, David, beheld encamping round Mount Zion; to the twelve legions, whose fiery swords would have been drawn at the word of the Messiah; to the "thousand thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand," whom Daniel saw standing before the Ancient of Days; and to the

multitude, to express which excelled the power of the apostle of the Revelations, when he beheld them standing on the sea of glass, and around the everlasting throne, and ascribing (in that hymn, of which all nature swelled the chorus) "Power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and blessing, to the Lamb that was slain [1]."

To the nature of their ministry the testimonies are still more explicit and numerous. For greatly do those men wrong the zeal, and greatly do they undervalue the happiness of angels who dream that the first is suffered to evaporate in incense and adoration, and never-ending minstrelsy, or that the second consists in luxurious ease alone amid the groves of Paradise or the splendours of the empyrean. Heaven has, no less than earth, its active duties; the blessedness of Heaven is an useful and energetic blessedness; and they who are sometimes painted as feasting in the kingdom and enjoying the presence of their Maker, are at others described as engaged in battle with the great dragon and his adherents, as stopping, in the cause of the saints, the mouths of lions, and subduing the violence of fire, as keeping guard round the prophets of the Lord, and as bearers of His orders to them; as ministering to the Son of God after His tempta-

1 Psal. lxviii. 17. Matt. xxvi. 53. Dan. vii. 10. Rev. v. 12. It is a striking suggestion of Ambrose (p. 1748), that as the sheep which was lost was but a hundredth part of the flock, the collective descendants of Adam may be supposed to bear the same proportion to the spirits who have kept their integrity.

tion, and in the hour of His mortal agony consoling and sustaining Him; as anxious and exulting witnesses of the progress of His Kingdom upon earth; as calling the Gentile Cornelius to be the first fruits of Christian adoption; as smiting with an invisible sword the arrogant and persecuting Herod, and breaking down before the apostle Peter the chains and gates of his captivity.

Nor is it only in these more conspicuous and supernatural dispensations of the Almighty that we may trace the agency of His messengers. It is indeed, as I apprehend, an unauthorised opinion which assigns to the nations of the world each one its tutelary governor; or which allots a separate genius to each believer with the name and commission of a guardian. But of some one or more celestial spirits (if our hearts be right with God) we are assured that we shall obtain the protection. And do not those hearts burn within us when we read of these mighty beings mingling in the converse, assuming the forms, and partaking of the hospitality of mortals; when we learn that not a sinner repents on earth but the angels rejoice in Heaven; that the celestial warriors encamp not only round the houses of the prophets, but around the person and property of every servant of the Almighty; that even the weakest and humblest believer is an object of interest to those who are themselves privileged to behold the face of the Heavenly Father; and that the death-bed struggle ended (and who knows how greatly their unseen

presence may support us under it?) it is they who carry the soul of the humblest saint to Paradise?

All these things are written for our instruction! It is to little purpose that we occupy our minds, or amuse our fancies by speculations on the number and dignity of these invisible warriors, if it is not at the same time impressed upon our hearts and our conduct, that the eyes of such as these pursue us into our most secret retirements; that they who rejoice in our repentance must also blush with indignation at our sins; and that if we desire their vicinity and protection, it behoves us that our daily practices be such as an angel may not feel pain in witnessing.

Μεταβαίνωμεν ἐντεῦθεν, let us depart hence, said the invisible guardian of the Jewish Temple, when the provocations of that infatuated race were about to receive their punishment[1]; but woe, eternal woe to that nation or individual from whom the angels of God turn away as from a polluted thing, the habitation, thenceforth, of dragons, and the cage of every unclean and every hateful power!

Nor, secondly, when we contemplate the unwearied activity in the service of God, the matchless condescension to the necessities of their younger brethren by which these high and holy spirits are distinguished among the creatures of God; when we behold the rulers of the elements keeping guard in a sick man's chamber, the inhabitants of God's

[1] Josephus Bell. Judaic. IV. 5.

presence protecting the slumbers of a child, the gods themselves (for such, as we have seen, the inspired writers are not afraid to call them) conducting the soul of a beggar to the bosom of peace and happiness[1], how deeply must we be affected with the necessity of those devotions which even angels are required to pay, with the dignity of those works of love and mercy in which the angels find their chief employment? Yea, more, it is an examination on which it behoves us seriously to enter, though it is an examination in which the best and boldest of us all can hardly proceed without alarm, how far the present tenour of our actions and our thoughts as men, are suitable to that hope which we entertain, through Christ, of being received among the angels hereafter? And, when we reflect how little the uncleanness and excess, the pride and avarice, the indolence and self-indulgence of mankind can accord with the circumstances and employments of the spiritual servants of the Almighty, we may be induced to shun more cautiously the sins by which we are led astray, to perceive more clearly the dangers of our natural condition, and more earnestly to seek His help, in whose name alone the angels are become our friends, and of whose grace only it cometh that His will is done either in earth or in Heaven.

And, lastly, since, in the creation of God, the number of his faithful servants is thus great and

[1] Luke xvi. 22.

infinite, how wretched, even on their own principles of action, does the folly of those men appear, who, against their better knowledge, against their habitual feeling, and in defiance of their secret and reasonable fears, surrender the hopes of virtue and piety, without attaining the brief happiness of vice, and follow what they esteem "the multitude to do evil!" I will not ask them to weigh the real importance, I will not entreat them to count the real numbers of those whose idle mockery they so greatly dread, whose applause they prefer to their own peace of mind, and the approbation, through life, of the truly wise and estimable. But, even if the preponderance of the public feeling were not, as it is on the whole, in league with consistent virtue; if the case were actually what they now persuade themselves, and they, and a few like them, were alone in an apostate world, we have no reason to apprehend that this world itself is among the most populous parts of God's creation, and if the virtuous man were really opposed in his practice and principles to all his fellow mortals, there would still be more with *him* than with *them*. They are not the minority who devote themselves to the service, and submit themselves to the reproach of their Redeemer. His flock may seem in the world which now is, "a little one," but "other sheep there are which are not of this fold[1];" and when the seats are full in the marriage supper of the Lord, and when

[1] St. John x. 16.

the new Heaven and new earth in which dwelleth righteousness, have received, in the day of His power, their holy and happy multitude, we shall understand how few in comparison have been the clamorous adversaries which, in this life, disturbed our repose; how blind the cowardice which, with the angels on our side, would have turned back in the day of battle!

SERMON IV

ON THE EXISTENCE AND INFLUENCE OF EVIL SPIRITS.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, and at Lincoln's Inn, 1822.]

EPHES. vi. 11, 12.

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

IT was an usual practice with St. Paul to describe the profession of a Christian, under the likeness of a soldier on duty, and, by allusions to the oath, dress, and discipline of the Roman military, to shadow out the several obligations, and graces, and privileges which distinguish and support the follower of Jesus Christ in his warfare with the enemies of his salvation. The whole of the passage from which these words are taken, is pervaded by this kind of allegory. In it he expects the Ephesian disciples to prepare themselves for this holy quarrel, as soldiers for the battle, or gladiators for the arena, and to case their souls in the panoply of

Heaven against the force or fraud of their opponents. The nature of this armour he explains in the following verses, in which he compares, with great liveliness of fancy and description, the entire equipment of an ancient warrior, with the graces and virtues of a worthy follower of the Messiah. To the helmet of the first he likens that exalted hope of salvation which is, to the latter, a defence and a crown. The impenetrable breast-plate of the soldier corresponds with the righteousness and good conscience of the saint; the iron-studded sandal of the one with that Gospel of peace which prevents the foot of the other from sliding; and the shield, which it was death to forsake, and the sword which was, in closer fight, the Roman's only weapon, with that faith from which even fiery darts fall blunted and powerless, and with that knowledge of God's word, the edge of which no sophistry can withstand.

To point out, as it deserves, the beauty of this parallel, is not my present purpose. It is enough to observe, first, that those powers and graces are called God's armour, inasmuch as we derive them from God's free bounty; and, secondly, that the danger must needs be great against which so great precautions are enjoined us.

While describing that danger, the utterance of the Apostle almost seems to labour for words sufficiently strong to express the strength of his conceptions, and the most aweful figures of might, and malice, and mystery, are collected to alarm us into

watchfulness. Principalities and powers are leagued against the soldier of the cross, and the believer has to contend against the united violence of the rulers of this world's darkness, and the spiritual wickedness which is in high places. High sounding words these, doubtless, are, and tremendous attributes of guilt and power; and it must deeply concern every one of us to understand their meaning rightly. To arrive at that meaning it may, in the first place, be observed, that all these terms are evidently employed by the Apostle in explanation of a phrase which he had used in the foregoing sentence, and which he had more briefly assigned as the reason why we should betake ourselves without delay to our celestial weapons. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle," he continues, "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." It is plain, therefore, that the enemy with whose wiles we have to contend, is the same with those who are spoken of under the several names of "principalities," "powers," and "rulers," and that these several antagonists are included under the same term of "the devil;" either because "devil" is a generic name which applies to their whole multitude, or because these principalities and powers are the subjects and soldiers of one powerful and malicious being, to whom the name of "devil" is peculiarly, and by

way of eminence assigned; who lays wait, by their agency, for the souls of men, and who directs and stimulates their craft and violence in the manner most likely to destroy or injure us.

By which of these suppositions we explain the words of St. Paul, is a matter of indifference, the consequences deducible from either are, in all their bearings, the same, and either is consistent with the application of this particular passage, and with the general terms of the Gospel. It is certain that the term "devil," or "wicked one," is often applied inclusively and generally to very many beings, who are represented as in perpetual hostility with God and good men; and it is also certain that these beings are described as under the government of one particular prince, whose angels they are, and with whom they are, hereafter, to be punished everlastingly[1].

[1] St. Matthew xii. 26. St. Mark iii. 26. St. Luke xi. 18. Grotius ad Marc. "Satanas videtur mihi hoc loco dici, *tota universitas malorum spirituum*, quomodo ὁ ἄνθρωπος (homo) pro *genere humano* aut *natura humana*. Non enim solus Princeps Spirituum sed omnes impuri spiritus eo nomine censentur." In conformity with this interpretation, St. Chrysostom observes that Christ did not use a plural term when speaking of the devils on the above occasion, but called them under one name *Satan*, to express the union which subsists amongst them, οὐκ εἶπε τοὺς δαίμονας, δεικνὺς πολλὴν αὐτοῖς πρὸς ἀλλήλους συμφωνίαν οὖσαν. Archbishop Sharpe's Sermons, v. 3. p. 72. "When we are speaking of the devil, we are not to understand any one particular being, or any one particular evil spirit, but the whole aggregate or company of evil spirits, which inhabit round about us in the lower regions of

A more important question, and one to which, for many reasons, it behoves us to be able to give an answer, is that which relates to the real nature of the enemies thus described. Are we to understand these alarming expressions in the plainest and most obvious sense, as instructing us that we are really surrounded by invisible foes; by beings superior to mankind in present power, but who envy mankind their hopes of future glory, and endeavour, in concert with each other, and in obedience to a common leader, to pervert our integrity, and destroy our happiness? Or are we rather to understand by the principalities here alluded to, those men who fight for, and forward the cause of Satan upon earth; those deceivers who would entice, and those persecutors who would terrify the Christian from his Heaven-ward journey? Shall we go farther still, and deny the existence of the wicked power that these enemies are said to serve? Is it only by a figure that they are represented as subject to one commander? Is that commander no more than an allegorical and abstract name for all which, in the visible world, opposes the establishment and progress of Christ's kingdom; an imaginary evil

the air. All these are, in the Scripture language, and in common speech, called by the name of the devil." That, nevertheless, there is one person peculiarly, and by way of eminence, thus called, as the general of a hostile army is called "the enemy," is plain from St. Matt. xxv. 41. Rev. xii. 9. "Inter impuros spiritus unum esse qui præsideat et Judæorum et Apostolorum scripta nos docent." Grotius on St. Matt. xii. 24.

principle invented to terrify the weak and ignorant; or at best, to represent, by a forcible metaphor, the regularity of concert, of purpose, and of tactics, with which, like an army under a skilful leader, our various enemies pursue their unholy warfare?

Of these three hypotheses, the first and the second are, I admit, extremely consistent with each other. A man may believe, to the fullest extent, in the existence of evil spirits, though he may suppose that the principalities and powers here mentioned are not spirits, but the mortal and persecuting governors of the Roman empire, and of the Jewish synagogue. He may admit the general doctrine, while he denies that this particular text inculcates it. But though the first and the second be thus compatible, yet are the first and the third hypotheses completely irreconcileable with each other. It is difficult for a professed Christian to deny the existence of evil spirits, if he admits that the present words of St. Paul are to be interpreted of them; it is impossible for a reasonable man to deny the existence of *a devil*, when he allows that there are many; and it would be mere idleness, the existence of such creatures being established, to cavil at the account given us in Scripture of their nature and the form of their government.

The text, therefore, which I have chosen, is extremely important in determining a question which has of late years arisen among Christians, concerning the existence of that person, or those persons, to whose influence is ascribed so large a portion of

the sin, and misery which, in our present state, surround us. I say, it is of late years that this controversy has arisen; because it is certain that, during more than 1700 years the Christian world, (however otherwise divided,) had on this point no difference of opinion. Even of that sect whose leaders have, in our own times, embraced with the greatest warmth the negative side of the controversy, the earlier doctors never questioned the existence of evil spirits in general, or of the *evil one* peculiarly so called; and Socinus and Crellius, and the other commentators of the Racovian school, have received and maintained the doctrine of the devil and his angels, not only without qualification, but apparently without suspecting that any qualification of it was possible [1].

This is not, indeed, the only nor the most important instance in which the modern English unitarians have outstripped, in the race of unbelief, their more learned or more cautious masters; but it is an additional proof that, the rule once transgressed which binds us to adhere to the obvious sense of

[1] Socinus ad Def. F. Puccii Resp. Op. tom. ii. p. 324, et alibi passim. Crellius, Comm. in 1 Cor. Op. tom. i. p. 359. "Paulus, cum de Christianorum hominum pugnâ loquitur, non obscure carnem et sanguinem opponit spiritibus malis, quibuscum nobis est luctandum, Eph. vi. 12." Id. tom. i. p. 50. 52, et alibi passim. Schlichting, ad h. l. Op. p. 172. Wolzogen, tom. i. p. 400. Przicpovius, ad h. l. Op. p. 152, 153. Brennius, Not. in St. Matt. p. 5. Not. in Ephes. ad h. l. p. 66. Catechism. Eccl. Polon. p. 338. "Nec hominibus tantum, verum etiam angelis et bonis et *malis* Christus dominatur."

Scripture, no reasonable limit can be anticipated to that tide of allegory which will then enter in; no doctrine, no fact be conceived, which the same process may not resolve into fable.

But however modern the objection, and however its recent date may be fairly urged as an argument against its probability, yet is the fact that an objection has been made to the usual doctrine of the Church on this subject, a sufficient reason for examining with greater care the grounds on which that doctrine rests. It is, indeed, but vain to conceal the truth from ourselves, that, partly from the natural disposition of man to confine their views within the limits of the visible world; partly from disgust at those monstrous and abominable follies with which priestcraft and superstition have, at different times, abused the notion of spiritual agency; and partly, perhaps, through the arts of Satan himself, who may expect to ensnare us with the greater ease when his influence is unsuspected, the notion of evil spirits has fallen into discredit and disregard with many who are far, indeed, from disbelieving or from disobeying the Gospel, but who might have derived, from the contemplation of this truth, yet stronger motives to Christian watchfulness, and a yet deeper sense of their dependence on Him who alone can deliver us from the evil one.

For this cause I have undertaken the discussion of the text which has been read to you, and will proceed to consider the interpretation, which has been already slightly noticed, and which regards

the enemies enumerated by St. Paul as mortal enemies only. And here it will be readily acknowledged that many of the words employed by him to denote their power and dignity, are by no means inapplicable to the potentates of the visible world.

"Principatus" and "potestates," the corresponding Latin terms to Ἀρχαὶ and Ἐξουσίαι, are the well-known and technical names for the supreme and delegated authorities of the Roman empire. "The rulers of this world's darkness," is a phrase which has been thought to apply with much propriety either to the rabbins of the corrupt and darkened synagogue, or to those heathen priests and false philosophers, whose dominion was erected on the ignorance and superstition of mankind. And the number of sects, and of perverse and wicked doctrines which, even in the age of the Apostles, had begun to infest the Church, has been conceived to tally with the description of "spiritual wickedness in high (or heavenly) places[1]." But these presumptions are, I conceive, greatly overbalanced by what may be urged against them. First, we are told by the Apostle, that the "wrestling" of which he speaks, is "not against flesh and blood," an expression which he could not have used had his description been intended to apply to the fleshly sove-

[1] Sueton. Cal. 22. "Nec multum abfuit quin statim diadema sumeret, speciemque *principatûs* in regni formam converteret." Juv. Sat. x. 99. "Hujus, qui trahitur, prætextam sumere mavis, An Fidenarûm Gabiorumque esse *Potestas*?" Wolf. ad h. l. Cur. Philol. tom. iv. p. 150, 151. Schöttgen. Hor. Hebr. p. 790.

reigns of mankind, or to the acts of any mortal adversary. It is true that some commentators of no vulgar name have conceived that "flesh and blood" may signify "men of mean condition," as opposed to "men of rank and power;" or "the ignorant," as opposed to "the learned [1]." But to pass over the apparent absurdity of distinguishing degrees of rank or acquirement by terms which apply equally to the tyrant and his slave, the doctor and his disciple, no ancient author has been found (I might say no author of any age or country), who has used the terms in question as these persons would have us understand them. The Jewish writers (with whom the phrase is one of frequent occurrence, and whose authority on such points cannot but be considerable with all such as consider who St. Paul was, and to whom the greater part of his Epistles were addressed) the Jewish writers always, so far as I have been able to discover, employ them in the sense of "mortal man," or to express the weakness of our common nature [2]. And, still more, there are many

[1] Wolf, ubi supr. Schöttgen, ubi supr.

[2] Hammond on St. Matt. xvi. 17. Works, vol. iii. p. 83. "The phrase σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα, *flesh and blood*, is a Hebrew phrase, בשר ודם, signifying no more than a mere man here upon the earth, one that hath ascended no higher than the common state of men. Thus it is ordinary in the Jewish writers. Take one example for all, in Gemara Babyl. ad Cod. Berachoth, where a parable of a rich man (the first draught as it were and monogram of that which is enlarged and filled up with lively colours by our Saviour, in St. Luke xvi.) is called משל למלך בשר ודם, *a parable of a king of flesh and blood;* that is, of a human mortal king

passages in the New Testament itself where these words cannot be explained in any other sense than that of the universal human family.

Thus, when Christ told St. Peter that "flesh and blood" did not reveal to him the fact of his Master's Divinity, can we suppose that He intended to insinuate (what was certainly not the case) that the Apostle had learned it from the wealthy or the wise of this world? When St. Paul assures us, that in the commencement of his preaching, he "applied not himself to flesh and blood," does he mean that it was not from the vulgar or the poor that he sought a commission to teach the Gospel? The time may seem lost which is spent in enlarging on a fact so plain; but the fact, I am bold to say, is decisive in itself against the manhood or mortality of those enemies whom the Apostle sends us forth to combat.

But, secondly, it is indeed very true, that the words which we translate "principalities and powers," were titles of human authority; and it is also highly probable that they were transferred from the events of this world to the language which men employed in speaking of celestial dignities. But it

here on earth. This example completely overthrows Schöttgen's notion, who brings, indeed, not a single instance in favour of it. To the instance adduced by Hammond, may be added Beresch. Rabba, § 4. f. 6. "Rex carnis et sanguinis edificat palatium et laquearia facit lapidibus, lignis, pulvere. Deus autem mundi laquearia non nisi ex aqua fecit." So also in § 49, and in many other places.

is certain, on the other hand, that they are most frequently applied in the New Testament to some particular ranks of spiritual creatures. That they are applied to *good* angels, and (if the expression may be allowed) to the constituted authorities of Heaven, the following passages will shew. In the first chapter of this same Epistle to the Ephesians [1], our Lord is described as set at God's "right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." Again, in a catalogue of those beings who were made by God through His Son, we find "things that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers [2]." But it would have been a grievous anti-climax in the former sentence, after describing our Lord as set at God's right hand in Heaven, to have added that, thus exalted, he was higher than the emperor of Rome, or the provincial governor of Asia; and it would have been utterly preposterous, in recounting the visible and invisible works of creation, to reckon as distinct species those few individuals who are only distinguished from the weakness and misery of their fellows by a purple garment and a circle of gold. I do not praise, I will not even justify, the vain curiosity of those speculative men who have pretended to describe the titles and precedence of the court of Heaven, no less mi-

[1] Ephes. i. 20, 21. [2] Coloss. i. 16.

nutely than the formalities of the Byzantine palace. But that there is some difference of rank among the sons of God may be inferred from the different rewards assigned to the different servants in the parable of the talents; from our Saviour's assurance that some should be great and others inferior in His kingdom; and from the manner in which, as we have seen, St. Paul affixes names expressive of gradations in rank to individuals or classes of the angelic hierarchy. And as, the fact being true, the names employed were indifferent, no names could be more proper than those which were already applied no less familiarly to angels than to men, by the Jewish and Grecian Christians [1].

Nor were they the chieftains of the faithful cherubim only, who were designated by the ancients under titles corresponding with those of earth. The devils, as well as the attendants on the Divine Majesty, were believed to be under regular discipline; and either to have retained these marks of distinction in memory of their first estate, or to have assumed them in fruitless emulation of the honours which God bestows on the leaders of the angelic army. The corresponding terms of "princes" and "prefects" of the devils, are of very frequent occurrence in the Rabbinical authors [2]. The name of "prince" is assigned by the Jews in St. Matthew's Gospel [3] to him whom they call Beelzebub, and,

[1] Schleusner's Lexicon, voc. Δύναμις.

[2] Schöttgen, Hor. Hebr. p. 382.

[3] St. Matt. ix. 34.

what is still more to the purpose, St. Paul himself complies with, and apparently sanctions, this form of speaking, by using the very names in question under circumstances where evil spirits only can be intended.

When, in his Epistle to the Romans[1], he boasts that no created thing can separate us from the love which is in Christ, he enumerates, among the circumstances by which our continuance in that love is endangered, the malignant endeavours of "angels, principalities, and powers." They are "principalities" and "powers" which Christ is said to have "spoiled and made a show of" in His glorious triumph over death and hell[2]. But, how cold is that exposition which would resolve these glowing descriptions into an allegorical account of the superseding of the Mosaic Law, by which our Lord reduced its rulers and scribes to insignificance and obscurity? Or why should we hesitate to conclude that, as in these passages, so also in my text, St. Paul is speaking of those rebellious angels, whose chief aspired to tempt the Son of God, and whose armies, like roaring lions, range about, seeking whom they may devour?

No less familiarly applied to evil spirits are the terms, "rulers of this world" and "of darkness." The very name of κοσμοκράτωρ, under this meaning, is usual and technical with the Rabbins; and it is hard to say how, with their known and pre-con-

[1] Rom. viii. 38, 39. [2] Coloss. ii. 15.

ceived opinions of demons and their residence, the persons whom St. Paul addressed could understand τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις any otherwise than of "the spirits of wickedness in the air[1]."

The text, accordingly, in its literal and obvious meaning, can only be supposed to refer to spiritual enemies. And it is almost needless to bring to your recollection the conformity of this interpretation with the general tenour of the New Testament, or how often those enemies are mentioned or alluded to in the preaching of Christ and His apostles. The ministry of our Lord Himself was commenced by a personal contention with the chief of their number; and to dislodge them from their human victims was one of the most frequent of those marvellous works whereby He asserted His claim to Divine authority[2].

[1] Schir Hoscherim Rabba, fol. 32. 3. "Deus S. B. vocavit angelum mortis, et dixit ipsi, Quamvis te feci κοσμοκράτορα super homines, &c." Ibid. "Angelus mortis—dicitur *Tenebræ*." Also in the book of prayers quoted by Wetstein, ad h. l. "Satanas Princeps Tenebrarum." Hammond, ad h. l. works, vol. iii. p. 631. "What ἐπουράνια signifies here will be soon discerned, first, by remembering that the several regions of the air, and all above the globe of the earth, is in the Hebrew styled שמים, and in the Greek of these books οὐρανοὶ, *heavens;* and so ἐπουράνια will signify those places, the several regions of the air; secondly, that, the Syriac reading, for πνευματικὰ, πνεύματα, and the phrase *spirits of wickedness in heavenly places* will be no more than the powers of the air under their ἄρχων, or *prince*, that is, the devils under Beelzebub." To the same effect see Grotius, ad h. l., and Eph. ii. 2.; Whitby, Eph. ii. 2.; Schleusner, voc. Ἐπουράνια, &c. &c.

[2] St. Matt. iv. 24. viii. 16. 28. ix. 32. xvii. 18. St. Mark i. 23. 32. v. 12. St. Luke iv. 2. 33. 41. viii. 2. ix. 1. xiii. 32, &c.

To "destroy the works of the devil," and subvert his authority among mankind, was the avowed and leading object of Christ's mission, and He Himself describes the prince of the wicked spirits as it were cast down from Heaven in consequence of the triumph of His Gospel[1]. To the envy and influence of the same malicious being we are taught by St. John to ascribe the transgression of our first parents, and all the misery which their disobedience has entailed on their posterity. Cain, who slew his brother, was under the power of "that wicked one." It is he who soweth tares in the spiritual field of Christ's Church; he who taketh out the words of life from the hearts of men, lest they should believe and escape destruction. It was the devil who prompted the treason of Judas, and the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira; the wicked who follow his pleasures are called his children; it was he who aspired to tempt the Son of God Himself by offering to His mortal view the power and pleasures of a worldly sovereign; and St. John expressly speaks of him as the fountain of all evil, when he tells us that "he that committeth sin is of the devil[2]."

Nor is it only as the seducer of mankind from the paths of holiness that he approves himself our deadly enemy: in several remarkable passages of Scripture he is represented as accusing the saints

[1] 1 St. John iii. 8. St. Luke x. 18.

[2] Rev. xii. 9. 1 St. John iii. 12. St. Matt. xiii. 39. St. Mark iv. 15. St. John xiii. 2. Acts v. 3. St. John viii. 44. Acts xiii. 10. St. Matt. iv. 1. 1 St. John iii. 8.

before God, and (either mediately through those men whom he has already ensnared, or by the immediate power of himself and his spiritual agents,) as impeding the progress of the truth upon earth; and persecuting, both in their bodies and in their outward circumstances, the servants of God and the Messiah [1].

And as he is thus, for a time, permitted by God to exercise the constancy and patience of His saints, so we are instructed to look forward to the period when Satan shall, by the same mighty Conqueror who hath already cut short his power, be beaten down beneath the feet of those whom he hath persecuted, in that day when everlasting fire is prepared for him and for his angels, and when, not only the wicked, but the devil who hath deceived them, shall be cast into the lake of torment [2].

In all these places it is difficult to conceive that either allegory or metaphor can be intended. It is hard to suppose that, in books meant for general instruction, and composed, as most of the books of the New Testament are, in a style extremely remote from every thing like poetry or fable, a fabulous and poetical mythology should have been so closely interwoven with their most solemn and literal truths, their most practical precepts, and their most aweful motives for faith and conduct. And however such terms as "the evil principle," the "powers of evil,"

[1] Job i. 6. Zech. iii. i. Rev. xii. 10. Job ii. 5. 2 Cor. xii. 7. Rev. ii. 10.

[2] St. Matt. xxv. 41. Rom. xvi. 20. Rev. xx. 10.

or "the gates of hell," or "the spirit of disobedience," might possibly have been explained away to mean "mischief" or "temptation" in the abstract, and from whatever cause arising, yet of "devils," of "spirits," of "Satan and his angels," we know, as well as any thing in the history of language can be known, the ancient and usual meaning; and it is certain that if such creatures be altogether fabulous, no words could possibly have been used by the Son of God and His apostles more likely to deceive their hearers.

Still, however, it is insisted that, admitting all these expressions to apply literally, and to be intended thus to apply to those evil and unfriendly angels of whom the Jews and Platonists stood in fear, yet the reality of such beings will not necessarily follow from the mention made of them in Scripture. "The doctrine in question," (I give the words of the modern leader of the Socinians,) "the doctrine of an evil spirit was unknown to the Jews previous to their captivity, but was, probably, borrowed by their learned men, at that time, from the oriental philosophy." "After their return it became, in process of time, the popular creed, and the popular language, being gradually fashioned to it, was adopted equally by those who did, and those who did not believe the theory on which it was founded." "But neither Jesus nor His apostles ever explicitly declare that they themselves admitted the philosophy which governed the language of the country in which they lived, much less do they

profess to teach it as of Divine authority." "The first teachers of Christianity neither positively affirm, nor authoritatively contradict the existence and agency of an evil spirit." "The doctrine, therefore, rests on its own evidence, that is, on no evidence at all[1]."

How much credit should be given to the assertions, and how much weight allowed to the arguments contained in this plausible and ingenious statement, may be learnt from the following observations.

That the doctrine of an evil spirit was unknown to the Jews before the Babylonish captivity (though it be an opinion which some men of considerable learning have adopted and maintained), will not be readily granted by those who, without perplexing the question with ambiguous names, and extraneous and irrelevant superstitions, confine their attention to the essentials of that doctrine as received by rational Christians.

It is true, indeed, that the word *Satan* is employed by Moses in a different sense from that of an *evil* spirit[2]; and it is also true that this word, when it occurs in the prophecies anterior to the captivity, may bear the meaning of any adversary, either spiritual or merely human. But, though we should grant that the name does not occur in the more ancient writings of the Jews, though we should even grant that no allusion to the *doctrine*

[1] Belsham, Review of Wilberforce, p. 36, 37.

[2] Num. xxii. 22.

of an evil spirit is found in those writings, it would be a very hasty inference that, therefore, the ancient Jews must necessarily have been ignorant either of the one or the other; far more that the latter must, on this account, be abandoned as a vain and superstitious fable.

The books in question which are, partly, the statute law of the Hebrew nation, partly some very brief and incidental notices of their history, and partly, religious admonitions addressed on various occasions to their rulers or the body of their tribes, are by far too few and too short to be received as containing the sum total of their opinions and their prejudices. Still less are we to condemn as absolutely untrue, whatever is not expressly revealed in the earlier parts of the Old Testament. It has been a question (for instance) with many learned men, whether the resurrection itself be really disclosed in the Jewish writings anterior to the captivity; but there are few who conclude from hence that the Hebrews first learned this doctrine from the Chaldeans, and still fewer, I trust, who on this account deny that the dead are raised. If, however (as many of the ancient and the most eminent of the modern commentators suppose), the book of Job were written or translated by Moses, it is certain that Moses *was* well acquainted both with the term "Satan," and with the notion of that being to whom the term is now appropriated [1].

[1] See on this question, Dupin. Canon. l. i. c. 3. Simon. Cri-

And, be this as it may, since the name of Job is placed by Ezekiel on the same honourable eminence with the prophets Daniel and Noah [1], it remains for our antagonists either to show by what other means, except by the book of Scripture which relates his virtues, those virtues could have been known to the Jews, or to admit that this book, and the name and doctrine in question, were known to them before they can be well supposed to have formed their opinions on the mythology of Babylon.

But, moreover, though the appropriation of the name "Satan" to a particular being or class of beings, should not have taken place till a comparatively recent period, yet will this go a very little way towards proving that the existence of such beings was unknown before. The name of *Jehovah* was first revealed to Moses during his abode in Arabia[2]; but they would be hardy reasoners who should hence infer that the house of Israel were previously atheists, or that He of whom Jehovah is since become the appropriate title, was not re-

tiqu. de Proleg. de Dupin, t. iii. p. 516. Huet. Demonst. Evang. p. 377. et seq. Johan. Henric. Michaelis in Hagiographos, t. i. p. 2. Patrick, Pref. to Job. Wells, ibid. Gray, Key to Old Test. p. 246. Joh. Dav. Michaelis, Mosaisches Reeht Art. 298. et alibi passim, and the very learned and able preface to the book of Job, translated by John Mason Goode, Esq. M.D.

[1] Ezek. xiv. 14.

[2] Exod. vi. 3. "And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty; but by my name Jehovah was I not known unto them."

verenced by the ancient patriarchs under the name of "Elohim" or "El Schaddai." And, whatever weight we assign to the uniform opinion of the Jews, that the same beings who were afterwards called "Satan" were described by Moses as "Schairim" and "Schedim," or, in whatever degree we yield assent to the arguments of Spenser, that this was the import of the word "Azazel[1]"; yet is it hardly possible to read with due attention the sixteenth chapter of the first book of Samuel, without being convinced that the "evil spirit" there spoken of, is precisely the same, both in the name and functions, with the evil spirits of the New Testament. As, then, it is certain that the doctrine in question was not first known to the Jews during their abode in Babylon, so there is not the smallest evidence (I might say not the smallest probability) that they derived it from the Chaldeans, or (still less) from the Persian system of philosophy and superstition.

But, further, at whatever time we suppose this

[1] Bochart Hierozoic. T. ii. p. 643. שעירים Mosi esse Dæmones, qui coluntur in Idolis putant plerique interpretes. Ita enim Chaldæi reddunt, et Syrus, et Arabs uterque, et Hieronymus, et *Hebræi omnes*. Neque res est sine exemplo. Nam ad Dæmones referunt Græci, Syrus, et Arabs, quod habetur Esai. xiii. 21. de Babylonis futura desolatione ושעירים et Esai. xxxiv. 14. ושעיר Neque aliud voluit Aquila Judæus cum שעירים reddidit τριχῶντας. Targum Jonath. ad Deut. xxxii. 17, explains שדים "Idolis quæ assimilantur Dæmonibus." For the word Azazel אזאזל see Spenser de Leg. L. iii. Diss. 8. De Hirco Emiss. cap. 1. sect. 2. 3.

doctrine to have been made known to the Jews, and from whatever source they received it, it is sufficient to establish its truth with impartial enquirers, if we find it afterwards confirmed by prophets and inspired persons, and more particularly by the Son of God Himself. A revelation from Heaven has no less authority to establish what is doubtful, than to disclose what is unknown; and on whatever grounds a doctrine has been at first believed, yet, certainly, if recognized by a celestial Monitor, that doctrine, thenceforth, becomes divine. If we suppose, for instance, that a nation to which Christianity is now first made known, has already received from its pagan ancestors the dogma of the soul's immortality, it will, in such a case, be probable that the opinion has been hitherto held on insufficient principles, or principles actually unsound. It may have been deduced from the unassisted grounds of reason and natural religion; it may have been taught as a part of an erroneous system of theology, and recommended to their faith on the authority of a Mango Capac or a Zoroaster. But, when its truth has been once confirmed by a new and better religion, when the voice of God shall have thenceforth sanctioned that verity which the nation had previously adopted, it will be preposterous in succeeding sophists to argue that the opinion is itself untrue, because their forefathers received it from a suspected fountain.

The question, accordingly, may be safely allowed to rest on the expressions of our Lord and His

apostles; nor will our antagonists themselves, as I conceive, deny that there are many expressions of theirs, which, like my text, can only be understood as referring to the doctrine of evil spirits. They can, therefore, only answer that "our Lord and His apostles conformed their language to the popular opinions of the time," "that they spoke of fiends and demoniacs, as they spoke of the rising and setting of the sun; but that they can by no means be fairly regarded as vouching for the perfect accuracy either of the ancient belief in spirits, or the ancient system of the universe."

But before this answer can be admitted as a solution of the difficulty, we may require them to show, first, that the doctrine in question is of such a nature, as that a Divine Teacher, knowing it to be untrue, could, with propriety, give it the sanction even of his acquiescence; and secondly, that the expressions used on this subject by our Christian teachers, amount, in fact, to no more than such an acquiescence in the errours of other men, without adding to them the weight of their own authority.

I will readily admit that an inspired teacher is not necessarily called on to undeceive his hearers in such harmless points of speculative opinion, as do not fall within the limits of that doctrine which he has in charge to deliver from Heaven. But, if an opinion be closely, though incidentally, connected with religious faith and conscientious practice; if it be interwoven with the strongest hopes

and fears of the human breast; if it be of a nature to disturb the weak and distract the timourous, it is the duty of a prophet, as it would be the duty of any other enlightened person, to undeceive his brother on a point of such a nature, no less than it would be his duty to relieve him from a groundless alarm, or to rouse him from a dream of agony.

Now, that a belief in evil spirits, whether true or false, is one of a gloomy and disquieting character; that it is one which may produce the worst results when indiscreetly and too curiously contemplated; that it has drawn some into the most loathsome guilt, and plunged others into the acutest suffering; that it has been the usual source of religious and magical imposture; and that its abuses may be traced through innumerable shades of human misery, from the fears of childhood to the ravings of frenzy, our antagonists are so far from denying that they ground one principal objection against its truth on its supposed inconsistency with the wisdom and mercy of our Creator. The solidity of this objection, I will not pause to consider; but it must be allowed, on the principles of our opponents themselves, that when even the incidental consequences of an opinion are thus dismal, that opinion is one which, if untrue, it well becomes a prophet to expose in its proper weakness.

If the confutation of such an errour as is here described, so widely spread, so practically calamitous, had been the principal, nay the single object of our Saviour's mission to mankind, will our an-

tagonists deny that, on their view of the question; it would have been a worthy and sufficient reason for a display of infinite power, and a revelation of infinite wisdom? But, when instances of a belief in evil spirits and of its wretched consequences encountered the prophet in every street, and haunted him through every province of Israel, can we suppose that, if the world were indeed deceived, a prophet of God would not have undeceived it; or that he would not have done so effectually and for ever, rather than have applied, by humouring its prejudices, a temporary palliative in the manner most likely to confirm its fears in future? A child flies weeping to his parent to complain that there is a lion in the wood: will the parent content himself with administering some childish comfort which will quiet his cries for a time, but leave their cause unabated, and his terrours ready to revive when he shall next approach the fatal thicket? Or will he not rather remove his alarm by convincing him of his folly, and by shewing him the true nature and security of that wood which his fancy has peopled with monsters?

But if a simple acquiescence in a gloomy prejudice be unworthy of the Messiah's character, what shall be said of the fact that the Messiah and His apostles, by their express words and significant actions, encouraged and confirmed this prejudice? Not only do they, from the credited fact that evil spirits existed, reason as an argument "ad hominem," and an argument taken from the notions of

those with whom they converse; they appear, in every instance, to have spoken and acted in the very manner in which they must have done had they been themselves persuaded of its truth; and there are some remarkable expressions of which, if they are not positive assertions of the fact, it is not easy to guess the meaning. When St. Paul informs us that "we wrestle *not* with flesh and blood, *but* with the principalities and powers of evil," can this be any otherwise understood than as an assurance that such powers exist distinct from man, and that men are called on to contend with them? When our Lord, in describing beforehand the most aweful transaction in which the human race can be parties, informs us that "everlasting fire is prepared for the devil and his angels[1]," would He have used such expressions if no such angels existed? When He commanded the unclean spirits, by that name, to depart from their mortal victims, can we conceive Him to have been, in such a case, addressing a nonentity, or that He would have lent the sanction of His word to a popular errour, when he might have cured the maniac by a touch, or have said to the epileptic person "be thou whole of thy plague!" What would have been our opinion of Zoroaster or Mohammed if they had, in like manner, administered to the fears of the vulgar, and taken credit to themselves for the defeat of imaginary enemies? Or, if we shrink

[1] St. Matt. xxv. 41.

from such thoughts as applied to the Celestial Author of our faith, what other conclusion can we arrive at, but that the doctrine which His solemn expressions countenanced, is true?

But, if it be thus difficult to explain away the words of our Lord, there are some of his actions, if possible, still less equivocal. I do not mean to enter on the extensive and difficult question of the manner in which evil spirits are said to possess human beings, or the degree of power which they exercise over their victims. But, if in the history of the supposed demoniac of Gadara, we apprehend no other person to be concerned but our Lord and His distracted patient; if it were no more than the diseased imagination of the sufferer which answered in the demon's name; and if it were the ravings of phrenzy only which desired that his tormentor might take shelter in the swine, can we suppose that our Lord, not content with simple acquiescence, not content with conforming his speech to the hallucination of the frantic man, would, by afflicting the herd with a like disease, have miraculously confirmed the delusion[1]? Do our antagonists believe this history? What manuscript, what authority, what ecclesiastical tradition can they plead for rejecting it from the place which it holds in the writings of three out of the four evangelists? Is the restoration of Lazarus to life less wonderful in itself, or more credibly attested? Or,

[1] St. Matt. viii. 28. St. Mark v. 9. St. Luke viii. 30.

what further reasons have we for believing that our Lord restored the leper to health, than that He cast out devils from the man who "had the legion?" I am addressing a congregation of Christians; they are Christians against whom I am now disputing; and I call, by that holy name, on you and on them, to beware how you select, according to your unsupported fancy or prejudice, those passages of the word of truth to which you will or will not give credit. Be our religion true or false, the New Testament is our only record of its facts and its doctrines. If the religion be false, that time is but lost which is spent in culling probabilities from a mass of errour; but, if true, woe, woe to them who refuse the testimony of God and His prophets, however strange to mortal ears the subject of that testimony may appear!

But, brethren, is it indeed incredible, is it indeed contradictory to reason, to the light of nature, and to the general analogy of God's works, that, as there are wicked *men*, there should be wicked *spirits* also? If the existence of evil is allowed at all, at what point in the scale of created being, can we decide that it shall be found no longer? Imperfection of some kind or other, yea, imperfection of every kind must cleave more or less to all but the Infinitely Good, and Wise, and Mighty. If there are invisible beings (and that some such there are but few have ventured to question) the probability, regarding it as a subject of philosophical analogy only, must be that oppression and malice will have

found their room in the unseen as well as the visible world, and that the Judge of all will have had occasion, how seldom soever, to tax not only men, but angels, with folly. And, since His providence on earth is accustomed to turn the fierceness of man to His praise, and by the blind and reluctant labours of the wicked, to work out His own holy will, and the general happiness of His creation, what wonder that He should, in like manner, employ the envy and malice of His apostate angels, and endure, with much long-suffering, those vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, to the intent that, by their means, the patience of His saints may be known, and that they whom He thinks fit to lead through a state of trial, may, like their Divine Master in His human nature, be made perfect through suffering!

I am not pleading the cause of those revolting excrescences with which the doctrine in question has, from time to time, been defaced and encumbered. We may dismiss to the abodes of errour and superstition the foolish and wicked fables which have alarmed our childhood, and been, to our youth, the occasion of mockery. We shall even do well to distinguish carefully the little which God's word discloses as to the invisible world, from the adventurous conjectures of the ancient fathers, and the glowing dreams of Milton and Klopstock. Of the particular crime or crimes which first deprived these angels of God's favour; of their previous rank, and of the exact degree of power which they are still

permitted to exercise; of the mode of their present existence, whether purely intellectual or united to some subtile vehicle; of the means by which they communicate with, and tempt the soul, and the influence which they exert over the material frame of nature; whether any portion of God's threatened wrath has already been poured out on them; or whether they have tasted as yet no more than the expectation of judgement to come, too little is revealed in Scripture to enable us to decide, and they are subjects on which we may well continue ignorant. It is enough for us to know, and thus much, it may be thought, is clearly communicated in Scripture, that our dangers are great, and our adversaries mighty and numerous.

For as we cannot impute to the inspired teachers of our faith a design to scare us into our duty by disproportionate descriptions of our peril, we must conclude that the alarming language which the Holy Ghost employs on this subject, is more, far more, than an ornament of rhetoric or poetry. "The prince of the power of the air," "the great dragon," the "god of this world;" these are no words of common terrour; and that fury which is compared to "a roaring lion," that tyranny from which we daily pray to "be delivered," must needs be one, to cope with which the best exertions of our natural and celestial strength are no more than sufficient[1]. And since seven of these spirits are, in

[1] Ephes. ii. 2. Rev. xii. 3. 2 Cor. iv. 4. 1 St. Pet. v. 8. St. Matt. vi. 13.

Scripture, assigned to the affliction of a single obscure individual; since over another so mighty a company kept watch as to deserve the name of "legion," we may well conclude that the entire army is great when such detachments as these are allotted to so trifling enterprises[1]. The parts, indeed, of tempter and accuser, which are, of all others, most frequently ascribed to Satan by the Holy Ghost, inasmuch as they imply, if not the continual, at least the very frequent, presence, and prompting, and superintendence of such an agent with every one of us, may convince us (since ubiquity is the property of God alone) that the name of Satan is, as I have observed, applied to many individuals, and that these individuals are sufficiently numerous to lay siege to every heart, and keep a watch over every action of mankind.

From these persuasions, however, many important consequences follow, and many thoughts may be suggested by them, which cannot but be extremely useful in the government of our lives and tempers. The assurance that our wrestling is "not with flesh and blood," may dispose our hearts to forgive those visible and mortal adversaries, who are, in fact, nothing more than the tools of that immortal and malignant being, who reaps his horrible harvest of sin and misery alike by their injustice, and by our immoderate resentment. Fling a stone at a dog and he will bite the stone; surely, no less irrational is our behaviour when, permitting

[1] St. Luke viii. 2. St. Mark v. 9.

ourselves to be overcome of evil, we rage against such of our brethren as the tempter employs to buffet us; who are, by so much the more worthy objects of our pity, by how much the more unjustly he has induced them to hate and injure us. Our warfare is *not* with flesh and blood, nor can we better prepare ourselves for the struggle than by a careful distinction, both in our thoughts and our prayers, between our apparent and our actual enemies.

It may, secondly, tend, in no inconsiderable degree, to unmask the danger and deformity of sin, if we steadily bear in mind whose counsels they are which seek to draw off our souls from God, by what motives those offers of pleasure and power are dictated, by which the tempter appears to consult our present ease or to provide for our future gratification. The advice and caresses of an enemy are, to a prudent man, an additional motive for distrust and circumspection; and when a thought is suggested to us which would lead to a compromise or desertion of our duty, it may often be useful to ask the question of our hearts, "Who is it that is urging me thus, and wherefore does he urge me? Can I believe that he has my comfort or advantage in view? that he can really desire to make my task of duty easier, or to smooth my road to heaven?" "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird[1]," and a deep-rooted conviction of Satan's presence and agency in those gilded and flowery

[1] Prov. i. 17.

toils which he daily spreads before our path, would in itself be almost sufficient to deliver "our souls from the snare of the fowler."

When, thirdly, we acknowledge the number and power of those tempters to whom the name of Satan is applied, how strange and aweful a prospect of things is opened to our mental view! How populous, how vital is the world! By what a cloud of witnesses are our most secret actions observed, and our most lonely hours begirt by how many unseen companions! Not a thought passes over our minds which may not be prompted by some unseen adviser; not a breeze fans our cheek but it may bring some airy visitant. Many of these, no doubt, are faithful servants of God, and fellow-servants of those who bore the testimony of Jesus; but how many are there also who hover round to work our ruin, and who exult, with hideous joy, over every crime we commit, and every misfortune which befals us!

And surrounded by so many and so great dangers, by enemies so numerous and so powerful, is it not our duty, nay, are we not in common prudence called on, to betake ourselves to religion and the protection of Christ, not only as the surest means of pleasing God, but as a present refuge and sanctuary? If we desire that the adversary should have no advantage over us, with how great earnestness should we seek that God who is a strong tower of defence to all that trust in Him; and the shelter of that name to which all things in Heaven and on earth, and under the earth, do bow down?

Let no man mistake my apprehensions! No slavish fears, no trifling superstition can follow from such views, when regulated by reason and Scripture. The sense of His power and presence, in whose sight both men and angels are as nothing, will at once extinguish, in a well-regulated mind, all idle dread of what either men or angels may meditate against us; while the notions which His word has taught us to entertain of evil spirits are, of themselves, sufficient to discredit the ordinary tales of witchcraft and apparitions. These warriors of darkness, these princes of the power of the air, will they lend their strength to the caprices of an earthly enchanter? Will they stoop from their whirlwind to rustle in a hermit's cell? Their schemes of destruction are, surely, on a sublimer scale; and, if it be true, (which I will not either assert or deny) that their agency extends to the material as well as the moral world, we may expect, at least, to trace it in actions widely different from those which cannot be heard without disdain. Nor is there any circumstance which has contributed more than these idle legends to a habit, of which the impropriety is too little felt, even by the devout and virtuous; the habit, I mean, of speaking of the destroyer in terms of pleasantry and ridicule; of mingling his name with our mirth and with our familiar and idle conversation.

Such language, to say the least of it, betrays a light and inadequate view of the danger from which we daily pray to be delivered; and by diminishing

our apprehension of the devil's snares, must diminish our watchfulness and our security. But, in truth, I am not sure but such expressions are in themselves, and of their own nature, evil. Sinners as we are, it is not for us to treat with scorn even the worst and most wretched of God's creatures, and that spirit against whom the archangel would not bring a railing accusation, is by no means a proper subject for the laughter of fools, or the songs of the drunkard [1].

While, however, the recollection of our own weakness, and of the former dignity of the fallen spirits, should restrain us from regarding them with any other feelings than compassion and self-abasement, the consideration of their malice and power, when compared with the protection which we enjoy in the present world, and the victory which is promised us in the world to come, will be, to a well-regulated mind, the source of abundant thankfulness to that God, who hath not given us over as a prey unto their teeth, and to that blessed Son who, to save us from their malice, hath humbled Himself

[1] Michaelis Jubr. vol. iv. p. 392, goes much further than I have done. "I really think" (are his words) "that they transgress the bounds of propriety who make it their business, either in the pulpit or in their writings, to represent the devil as *an object of detestation*; since, notwithstanding his fall, he is still a being of a superior order." How we can do otherwise than regard the devil as an object of detestation, I do not know; but without laying any stress on his *present dignity*, his *fall* may well operate on us as an aweful warning, nor have we any right to insult the fallen.

to endure its violence. Were human weakness and folly opposed unaided to the power and craft of angels, the contest were, indeed, without hope. But, God be praised, it is not in our own strength that we are to contend with them. We fight under the banner of Christ our Lord, and the armour which His grace supplies to us is proof against all their terrors. While, therefore, the recollection that we wrestle with principalities and powers should make us sober and watchful unto prayer, the means of defence which we have received from the Most High should remove from us all desponding thoughts, and warm our inmost souls with a holy hope of victory.

But let us remember that this hope must needs be vain, unless our own exertions correspond with it, and that it is by a faithful perseverance in the works and warfare of a Christian, that our salvation must be secured. The helmet, the breastplate, the sandals of peace, which decorate the soldier of the Messiah, these are not a clothing adapted for sleep or revelry. The faith which is our shield is useless, if we suffer it to hang idle by our side; and our knowledge of the Scripture is but a sheathed sword, unless we wield it against the destroyer. Nor, let us forget that, even thus provided, we cannot hope of ourselves to help ourselves, and that our mortal courage and our celestial panoply must both alike be vain, unless we frequently support the one and renew the other by the holy influences of Christ's altar and sacrifice, and by that fervent prayer, which

can call down the Captain of our salvation to our rescue, and interpose the promise of the Most True God between ourselves and our spiritual enemies.

And to Him, the Seed of the woman, and bruiser of the serpent's head, to Him, from the inhabitants of every world, and element, and sun, and star, and from all who dwell on the earth, above, or under it, be ascribed, as is most due, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, all might, all honour, glory, and dominion now and for ever. Amen.

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SERMON V.

ON THE INSPIRATION OF THE PENTATEUCH.

[Preached at Lincoln's Inn, November 10, 1822.]

EXODUS iii. 14.

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM; *and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel,* I AM *hath sent me unto you.*

IN considering these words of God to His servant Moses, there are three points to which I am chiefly anxious to call your attention. They are, first, what grounds we have for believing that such a communication was actually made to Moses; secondly, the character and rank of the celestial person by whose immediate agency it was made; and thirdly, the meaning of the communication itself, and its moral and religious consequences. And though these topics have been so often and so ably discussed, that little novelty or illustration of argument can be expected on any of them, yet the endeavour may, by God's blessing, be not without its use, to present in a compendious form to my younger hearers some of the most striking evidences of that earlier creed on which our own is

mainly founded; to point out, in one conspicuous instance, the connection which subsists between the Mosaic and the Christian economy, and to refresh in our minds that recollection of God's nature and attributes in which both Jew and Gentile have, in all ages, been equally concerned.

It is true, indeed, and it is an observation which it is wise as well as candid to bear in mind, that our faith in the Lord Jesus may be satisfactorily defended by the internal and external evidence of the New Testament alone, though we should abandon as spurious or apocryphal the volume of the law and the prophets. It was thus that very many of the ancient heathen were converted who cannot have been acquainted, to any great extent, with the sacred writings of the Jews; and it was thus that some early sects to whom, notwithstanding their errours, it would be unjust to deny the name of Christian, rejected the inspiration of the books of Moses as at variance with those Platonic prejudices[1] which were among the greatest hindrances which the Gospel had at first to encounter.

But though it be possible to receive the Christian faith without acknowledging the previous claims of the Mosaic theology, and though the defence of

[1] Epiphanius Hier. lxi. 74. Λέγει ὁ αὐτὸς Μάνης, οὐ δύναται ἑνὸς διδασκάλου εἶναι παλαιὰ καὶ καινὴ Διαθήκη—§. 75. Δένδρεσιν δὲ ἐξηραμμένοις καὶ γεγηρακόσιν ἀπεικάζει πάλιν νόμον καὶ προφήτας. Irenæus, l. i. §. 24. [Basilides] prophetias a mundi fabricatoribus fuisse ait principibus, proprie autem Legem a principe ipsorum. See also §. 29, &c.

the one would not be desperate even if the other were unknown or abandoned, yet it is certain that by such an abandonment we should rob Christianity of that most powerful and convincing support which is afforded by the unbroken chain of prophecy; that we should relinquish the most valuable commentary which God has furnished on the religion of His Son; and that, since the first teachers of Christianity so often appeal to the authority of the law in order to establish their own Divine commission, we must, if the law be abandoned, endanger, in no small degree, their inspiration or their sincerity. When, therefore, we defend the Divine original of the Jewish creed, we are defending, in fact, our own;—and with this impression I will now submit to your consideration some few of those arguments which arise from the internal evidence of Scripture to establish the fact that Moses was really so honoured by God as is related in the third chapter of Exodus.

It may, in the first place, be maintained on grounds which will hardly be disputed or impugned by a candid unbeliever, that the account contained in the Jewish Scriptures of the parentage and education of Moses, of the authority which he acquired over the Israelitish tribes, and the religious and political system which they received from him is, in its essential points at least, and its leading and general outlines, accurate. I will not discuss the truth or falsehood of that supernatural machinery by which, if we believe the sacred historian, the

mission of Moses was announced and ratified. Those marvels which were, to their immediate witnesses, the most appropriate and convincing evidence that Moses was sent by God, are to us, in themselves, the subjects of faith alone, which cannot be brought forward as proofs of that history on whose credit we receive them. But if they cannot be adduced as proofs, neither can they be reasonably objected to as impeachments of the historic credibility of the Pentateuch, since, if we can establish by any other means the Divine commission of Moses, such wonders, as a consequence and accompaniment of that commission, become at once (if I may use the expression) natural, while much, very much will remain in the Mosaic volume from which we cannot reasonably withhold our belief, even though we should regard as exaggerated or fabulous "the ten wounds which tamed the River Dragon [1]," and the mighty arm of God which was made bare in the Red Sea and in the wilderness.

In all ancient histories there is a frequent recurrence of prodigies. And it is a question which unbelievers might do well to weigh attentively, whether this prevalence, in every nation of mankind, of similar traditions or assumptions, may not be reasonably regarded as one proof of a common origin,

[1] ——————"Thus with ten wounds
The River Dragon tam'd, at length submits
To let his sojourners depart."—PAR. LOST, xii. 190.
See Ezek. xxix. 3.

and as the recollection of some earlier age when those occurrences were real and frequent of which the priestcraft of a later day was no more than a spurious copy? Imposture is often the shadow of truth; nor is it easy to conceive how the idea first arose of claiming, however falsely, an intercourse with the invisible world, unless our species had been really at one time admitted to converse with angels and with God, and the fact had thus been ascertained and generally understood, that such an intercourse was not incredible. But, be this as it may, it will be granted that, in whatever histories such supernatural revelations are found (though we should regard these particular passages as, in themselves, uncertain or incredible), we do not, therefore, reject the facts which the same writers record, so far as those facts are consistent with general experience, and confirmed by external testimony. We believe that Cyrus conquered Sardis, and that Romulus founded the city which bears his name, though we reject as fabulous the miraculous deliverance of Crœsus from the flames, and the wolf by which the Italian chief is said to have been fostered. And (to select a more modern example, and one which so far resembles the case of Moses, as it involves, like his, a claim to celestial inspiration,) we believe the circumstances contained in what may be called the civil biography of Mahomet, though we deny that his nightly solitude was visited by the angel Gabriel; that he hid the moon in his sleeve, and was carried on a winged mule to Paradise. And, in

like manner, the most suspicious sceptic may admit (however his belief be, for the present, withheld from the supernatural parts of the Mosaic narrative) that Moses was born of Hebrew parents; that he was brought up by an Egyptian princess among the priests and sages of her country; that he remained during many years an exile in Arabia, from whence he returned, at an advanced age, as the teacher of a new religion; that he conducted a mighty multitude of oppressed peasants from Egypt to the borders of Palestine; and on their way delivered to them, amid the valleys of Mount Sinai, those laws which, in after ages, distinguished the Israelites from the rest of mankind.

To such an assent, indeed, every rational enquirer will be guided by the consistency of the account here given with the current traditions of the heathen world, no less than by the demonstrable antiquity of the Pentateuch, and its candour and simplicity. All heathen authors with whom I have met agree that the Jews went forth from Egypt to Palestine, and that they received from Moses the ritual of their solitary God. That this Moses was a priest or learned man of Heliopolis, and that his departure from Egypt was preceded by circumstances of great distress to the Egyptian nation, were recorded or admitted by all the chroniclers to whom Josephus and Eusebius refer; while even the learned and indefatigable hostility of Apion was able to elicit no other tradition from the native

authorities which he consulted[1]. That by these last some important circumstances were forgotten or suppressed, and many odious and improbable particulars engrafted on the simple Mosaic history, we shall not think strange if we consider the lapse of ages which had intervened, and the mutual irritation under which the Israelites had parted with their task-masters. But that Moses really existed, and was nearly such a person as is described in the Sacred Volume, is as strongly confirmed by external and even by hostile evidence, as can be reasonably expected in transactions of such extreme antiquity.

But the demonstrable antiquity of the work in which this account is given affords a yet stronger presumption of its general and historic accuracy. Even if we should take the latest date which infidelity has assigned for the composition of the Pentateuch, and grant (which can only be granted for the purposes of temporary argument) that Ezra was its compiler, we have still a compilation coeval with the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus, and older, by some years at least, than the oldest heathen historian. And since it is certain that, from very high antiquity, the art of alphabetical writing was known to the nations of Phœnicia and Palestine; since experience proves that, wherever men can write at all, they begin with writing down the

[1] Tacitus, Hist. iv. 3. Justin. Hist. l. xxxvi. Joseph. contra Apion, l. i. §. 26. ii. §. 2. See also Eusebius, Præpar. Evang. ix. 8.

names and exploits of their ancestors; and, since the successive and gradual transportation of the nobles, the kings, the priests, and the archives of Judah to Babylon, before the final ruin of their city by Nebuchadnezzar, removed the greatest and only danger to which such documents had, in their instance, been exposed, it would be idle to deny the probable existence, in Ezra's time, of many authentic historical documents, or to refuse to the most celebrated of Jewish scribes that credit as a collector of his nation's antiquities, which we assign to Livy in the Roman, or to Diodorus in the Grecian history.

But, though a high degree of credit would have fairly attached itself to whatever even Ezra had related concerning the origin of the Hebrew republic, there are many circumstances which compel us to ascribe the Pentateuch to another and a far earlier author.

We have, first, the acknowledged writings of Ezra himself and his contemporary and coadjutor Nehemiah, detailing with much minuteness the measures which they jointly and severally pursued for the restoration of the Jewish polity. But by neither is the most distant allusion made to that which, if real, would have been the most illustrious of Ezra's labours, the collection and digest of the ancient national history and jurisprudence. Nor, though both Ezra and Nehemiah repeatedly mention that "Book of the Law" which Ezra read and expounded

to the people, do they ever intimate that he had himself compiled the work in question from the songs of the ancient bards, or the traditions of the wise men before the captivity.

Will it be said that Ezra was the rebuilder of a decayed superstition; that it was necessary for him to support his new made code by the venerable name of Moses, and to merge the vanity of an author in the darker pride of a successful imposter? Yet surely, when a book of great pretended antiquity was to be obtruded on a nation who had never heard of it before, it would have been necessary, in order to secure its reception at all, to render some account of its loss and subsequent recovery. We, surely, should have been told how "Ezra the servant of the Lord was guided to the tomb of Moses;" how the precious manuscript of their great prophet was discovered among the ruins of their former temple; or how that book which the priests of elder time had concealed from profane curiosity, was to be exposed at length to the devout examination of the multitude of faithful Israëlites!

But of this sort of juggling there remains not the smallest vestige. Both Ezra and Nehemiah speak of the book of the law as of a composition with which those to whom they write had already been long familiar; as one which, sixty years before, had directed the proceedings of Jeshuah and Zerubbabel in their consecration of the second temple; and which had been handed down from the re-

motest antiquity, as the genuine work of their inspired legislator [1].

Nor is this all. The books of Moses are far from standing alone or unsupported in the canon of the Old Testament. There are others there which no sceptic has yet apprehended to be the works of Ezra, or of any other than the authors to whom they are usually attributed. The book of Joshua contains the strongest internal evidence of having been written while the harlot Rahab was yet alive, and by one who had himself passed over Jordan with the Israelitish army. Those of the Kings are certainly not Ezra's composition, inasmuch as they are not infrequently at variance with Ezra's own statements in his Books of Chronicles. No imposters (I might say no number of imposters) could have counterfeited the local and temporary allusions, the vast variety of style, of sentiment and circumstance, which are found in the different moral and prophetic writings, from the polished elegance of Solomon to the homely vigour of Ezekiel; from the querulous language of Jeremiah to the fiery majesty of the evangelical prophet, and from the calm didactic morality of Asaph to the songs of David, abounding in every beauty of which lyric poetry is susceptible. All these writers, however, and others whom I have not instanced, alike refer to the law of Moses as a written volume;

[1] Psalm xl. 7. Joshua i. 8. 2 Kings xxiii. 2. Ezra vi. 18. Dan. ix. 11.

and we have thus a chain of evidence to its antiquity, ascending from the time of Ezra himself, to a period when the memory of Moses must have been yet green, and his actions and character familiar, when some must have survived who had shared his last benediction, or who had witnessed his firm step and vigourous old age as he climbed the steep of Pisgah [1]. And this, it may be observed, will shew the weakness of Volney's hypothesis, which regards the Pentateuch as a compilation made after the return of the Jews from Babylon [2]. That hypothesis is, indeed, confuted by the total silence of Jeremiah, the son perhaps, but certainly the contemporary of this same Hilkiah, the whole purport of whose writings is to enforce, with pathetic denunciations of vengeance, the observation of the laws of Moses. But there is no single passage in all his fifty-four chapters; nor is there a single passage in any of the prophets who lived during the Babylonian captivity, in which this law is spoken of as a matter of recent discovery; in which they deplore the carelessness of their fathers who had suffered so precious a document to fall into oblivion; in which they extol the mercies of God who restored it to their generation; or magnify the zeal and diligence of those good men by whom it had been so recently snatched from the dust of the sacred archives. On the contrary, they all speak of the law as Ezra did afterwards, and as David had done before them, as

[1] Deut. xxxiv. 1. 7. [2] Voyage de Volney, t. iii. p. 115.

a work familiar to their nation from its first political existence, and the transgression of which was not more the sin of one generation of Israelites than of another. It is evident, therefore, that (however the accidental discovery of a very ancient copy of the law, perhaps the autograph of Moses himself, may have excited in Josiah's mind a greater attention to its contents than had been excited by the usual copies in circulation,) it was no new work, which in his days the high priest discovered in the Temple[1], nor could Hilkiah have, by any possibility, been the forger of a volume which many hundred years before his time had been read by Joshua and by David.

It is true that some sceptics have attempted to distinguish between the legal and historical parts of the Pentateuch, and, while they allowed the former to be the genuine work of Moses, have ascribed to Hilkiah, or to Ezra, all those passages which fall under the second description[2]. But, first, it was a legal, not a historical passage, by the recital of which Hilkiah so strongly excited the alarms of his sovereign. So far, therefore, as Hilkiah is concerned, he had no interest in, no conceivable motive for the historical forgery which is ascribed to

[1] 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14.

[2] Vandale, Dissert. de Idololatria, p. 685—7. Vides interim, Celeberrime Vir, me distinguere Codicem Legis a Pentateucho. Quod porro attinet ad Pentateuchum, is, certe, mihi compositus videtur ab Esdra Scriba. So also Hobbes and Spinosa, referred to by Kidder; Dissertation concerning the Author of the Pentateuch, xxiv.

him. And, secondly, in the case of Ezra, the difficulty is apparent of separating the laws themselves from the circumstances which called them forth, and which can only satisfactorily account for their repetitions, their redundancies, their very defects, (for to such occasional defects I am not insensible,) as a regular system of jurisprudence. Thirdly, the same precise name of "the Law," התורה, Ha Thorah, which the modern Jews, and the writers of the New Testament apply to the Pentateuch in its present state, is applied to the volume as it existed in the days of Isaiah, of Micah, and of Joshua. Fourthly, it has never been pretended that the poetical and prophetic writings of the Old Testament were composed by Ezra, or by any other than those persons whose names they bear; the writings of Ezra (in the book that is called after him, and the two books of Chronicles, which present every internal evidence of proceeding from the same author,) though extremely pious, plain, and sensible, do not bear any marks of the peculiar genius, the touching simplicity, the powerful description, the military and political intelligence, the animated eloquence, and impassioned poetry, which distinguish, in a remarkable degree, the historical chapters of the books of Moses. But it is certain that almost all the writers from David and Asaph down to Haggai, the contemporary of Zerubbabel, abound in references and allusions not only to the legal but the historical parts of the Pentateuch. Thus the garden of God, and its covering or guardian

cherubim, are spoken of by Ezekiel as topics which those whom he addressed understood without explanation. The manner of Abraham's call is noticed by Isaiah, and the various passages in Jacob's life by Hosea. The peculiarities of Melchizedech's character and situation were known to David; and the covenant which God made with Abraham to all the Jewish prophets. All, or nearly all, mention the destruction of the offending cities of the Pentapolis. To the captivity in Egypt allusions occur in the Psalms, in the prophecy of Micah, (the contemporary of king Jotham,) in Isaiah, who prophesied in the days of Uzziah, and in Jeremiah, who lived during the reign of the Jewish monarchy. The passage of the red sea, and the miracles wrought in the wilderness, are celebrated by Asaph, David, Isaiah, Amos, Habakkuk, and Micah.—Micah speaks also of the malice of Balak and Balaam[1]. If it were contended that the Pentateuch of Ezra was copied from the same traditions to which, and not to that Pentateuch, these passages of the prophets allude, it would, at least, establish the credit of Ezra as a faithful collector of ancient

[1] Ezek. xxviii. 14. Isa. xxix. 22. Hosea xii. 2—4. 12. Psalm cx. 4. lxviii. 7. lxxvii. passim. lxxx. 8. lxxxi. 5. Micah vi. 4. vii. 15. 20. Isa. iv. 5. lxiii. 11. et sequ. Jer. ii. 6. xvi. 14. xxxi. 32. Amos ii. 10. iii. 1. v. 25. Habbak. iii. 3—15. Haggai ii. 5. Micah vi. 5. The number of these citations might be greatly enlarged, but from the Psalms I have only adduced those which bear the names of David and Asaph, and I have avoided all those references in the other prophets which might admit of hesitation or ambiguity.

history. But the coincidence not only of facts but expressions, is, in many of these instances, too close to admit of this solution; and it would even, I apprehend, be possible to show, by a collection of the passages to which I refer, on the same plan with Lardner's "Collections of Citations of the New Testament in the Christian Fathers," that the prophets before Ezra had both seen and quoted the Mosaic history, a proof which would in itself be decisive of the question whether Ezra were the author of the Pentateuch. Fifthly, it might be asked, why, if Ezra were really engaged in so great a work as that of collecting and arranging the scattered and neglected annals of his country, why is no mention made of this illustrious labour, either in the acknowledged writings of Ezra himself, or those of his coadjutor Nehemiah? Surely, if he did it openly, and as a faithful antiquary, it was at least as well worth recording as his exactness in weighing out the gold of the temple, or his diligence in the public exposition of the law. Or, if he should be suspected of having imposed his collection on the world as the original work of Moses, yet would the previous loss and fortunate discovery of such an inestimable manuscript have been surely noticed with some degree of parade by those who thus sought to deceive, not only their contemporaries, but posterity.

As, therefore, neither the composition nor the discovery of the records now called Mosaic, is noticed either by Ezra or Nehemiah, it is next to

certain that no such composition or pretended discovery took place at the time of which we are speaking; and that the Pentateuch, as we now receive it, must have proceeded from a more ancient author.

Above all, however, it should be recollected that these books, in their present form, are received not only by the Jews and Christians, but, with some few and unimportant variations, by the Samaritans also. Now there are only three points of time at which there is the remotest likelihood that such a volume could have obtained a sacred authority among these inveterate enemies of the Jewish name and nation; the first when the Cuthœan settlers were converted, by the orders of Shalmanezer king of Assyria, to a corrupt and mutilated Judaism; the second when Josiah reformed, by a short lived and violent exertion of authority, the religious rites of the scattered remnant of Israel; the third when Manasseh the son of Jehoida apostatized from the worship of his ancestors, and established his schismatical temple on the summit of mount Gerizim[1]. But if, with Vandale and Simon, we take the last of these dates, it is evident that Manasseh (degraded as he had been from his priestly character and his hereditary rank in the state, by Ezra's influence and authority) would never have taken with him to the sect and city of his refuge, a Scripture of Ezra's composition, or which, on Ezra's testimony alone, was received as the work of Moses. He would rather, it may be

[1] 2 Kings xvii. 27, 28. xxiii. 2, 3 2 Chron. xxxiii. 4, 5.

thought, have made the novelty of his Scripture a pretext (and a very plausible pretext it would have been) for the separation which he was meditating. Had Laud, for instance, composed a body of ecclesiastical history, it will hardly be said that the puritans were likely to have adopted it as a text book. And if Manasseh did really introduce the Pentateuch to the knowledge and veneration of the Samaritans, he can only have done so because it was a work in prescriptive possession of the minds of men, and one to which both Ezra and his opponents alike deferred as of ancient and sacred authority. But, in truth, if we believe with the universal stream of Hebrew tradition, that the square or Babylonian letters were invariably employed by the Jewish scribes, from the time of the removal of their nation to Shinar; it is apparent that the more ancient and uncouth Phœnician character, in which the Samaritan Pentateuch still remains, is an evidence as satisfactory as can be reasonably expected, that this last nation did not derive their Scripture from Manasseh or any other Jew of the second temple.

I am aware, indeed, that there are critics, who have attempted to show, from some remarkable false readings of the Samaritan Pentateuch, that it must have been originally copied from some manuscript in the Babylonian letter[1]. But, for such a

[1] Prideaux ubi supra. p. 597-8. In opposition to whom see the admirable and convincing statement in Walton's Prolegomena to the Polyglott, ix. 74.

transfer from a beautiful and convenient to a singularly rude and perplexing alphabet, no reason has been assigned, and it would be, apparently, not easy to find any. To the priests who apostatized together with Manasseh, it would have been a hinderance instead of an advantage. To them a *translation* of the Hebrew text might, indeed, have been useful, and such a translation was, not many years after, prepared as an aid to those persons whose office it was to interpret after the public readers in the synagogue. But a mere *transcription* of the same Hebrew text into the Samaritan character, would no more have enabled a Samaritan to understand the Scripture, than a transcription of the text of Luther's Bible from Gothic into Italic letters, would confer on an Englishman the power of reading German. Nay, more, as the Samaritan Pentateuch is without points, the public reader would have been incompetent, however familiar he might be with the alphabet, even to pronounce by rote the words for which such letters stood, without a previous knowledge of the Hebrew tongue. It is surely, therefore, more reasonable to account, with Mede and with Walton, in another manner for the circumstances so much insisted on; to conclude with these eminent scholars, that the Samaritans had really received their Pentateuch before the captivity, and to make our choice between the only two epochs which remain, that of Josiah and that of Shalmanezer.

But the short reign (short at least for so great a

work as the reformation of a national religion) and the violent measures of Josiah, were little likely to obtain any permanent veneration for a book introduced by his authority. It was still less likely that, acting on Jewish principles, he would feel any anxiety for the instruction and orthodoxy of the heathen colonists of Assyria, and it is least likely of all that his authority or his severities can have extended over the garrisons of that conqueror to whom he was himself a tributary. There is, surely, then, abundant reason to conclude that the Samaritans received their sacred volume from the missionary employed by their own monarch Shalmaneezer, to instruct the worshippers of Nergal and Ashima, in the service of the God of the land in which they were planted.

But this missionary was himself a schismatic, a priest of the high-places, a subject of the kingdom founded by Jeroboam, brought up in hereditary enmity against the house of David, and the priests of the Lord at Jerusalem. From them we may well believe such a person would adopt no novelties, and we have therefore the best reason to conclude that the Mosaic volume, as we now possess it, was known and reverenced by the ten tribes of the house of Israel, as well as the two of Judah, and must therefore have been received before the separation of the monarchy, and while all the twelve tribes were under a common form of worship and government.

And, having thus far traced the entire Pentateuch

towards the age of its reputed author, I will ask whether any moment can be named, between the age of Solomon and that of Moses, in which (had such a volume then first appeared, or had the law received that species of historical interpolation which the hypothesis that I am now examining supposes) an occurrence so important to the religious opinions of the Israelites would not have been noticed by some of their religious or historical writers; I will go farther, and will venture to assert that the mutual jealousy of the tribes, so apparent throughout the whole history of the Judges, of Saul and David, the scattered residence and alternate duties of the priesthood, destroying all unity of purpose, and obviously and admirably calculated to operate against innovation of every kind, I will say that these circumstances opposed a barrier, in the commonwealth of Israel, to forgery or interpolation little less than that which, in modern Christendom, preserves the purity of the New Testament inviolate. Nor shall I do more than barely notice the strong internal evidence afforded by the books of Moses of their having been written in the desert south-east of Palestine by one who was intimately acquainted with the different productions and peculiarities both of Arabia and Egypt, and who himself bore a principal part in the journey which he describes; circumstances both of character and situation which will suit few other persons than Moses, and which no Israelite of a later age was likely to have possessed or successfully counterfeited.

But enough has, I trust, been said to establish the antiquity of the Pentateuch; what further grounds there are for belief in its veracity and inspiration, may be examined in a future sermon. In the mean time, and long as I have already trespassed on your patience, I may yet, I trust, be pardoned if I earnestly recal your attention to that solemn connexion which should subsist between the Christian's head and his heart; between the evidences, the feelings, and the habitual practice of our religion! It is not as a subject of antiquarian curiosity; it is not as the earliest record of that picturesque and characteristic style of manners for which the east is still renowned, of which the singularity arrests our attention, and the simplicity appears to denote the youth and freshness of society: it is not for their interesting pathos, or the glowing strains of their poetry, that the Christian is enjoined to give a portion of his day to the records of an earlier revelation. It is there that we should trace the wrath of God made manifest against a guilty world; yet arrested, yet disarmed, yet absolutely turned into blessing by the efficacy of the foreseen atonement. It is there that we should learn to appreciate the strength of human passions, and the weakness of human virtue, displayed in the melancholy story of the most favoured race of mankind, informed though they were by an unbroken line of prophets, and chastised or supported by a long succession of wonders and miracles. It is there that we should accustom ourselves to prize as they deserve our own advantages

in Christ Jesus, when we compare the Israelite's hope of a contingent with our confidence in a complete redemption; and his erudition, through symbols and shadows, with our almost plenary admission into the mysteries of the kingdom of God!

But if our elevation be great, let us recollect that it may be also dangerous; that of him to whom much is given, our Master is accustomed to expect the more; and that the more illustrious our insight into the great and connected scheme of God's wisdom, and justice, and mercy, the greater should be our care that our knowledge may ripen into faith, and our faith may bring forth fruits of daily and hourly holiness. It should be ours to excel the ancient Israelites in our virtues as well as in our privileges, and it should be ours (as sensible from whence our virtues as well as our privileges are derived,) having done our all, to refer that all to the grace, the merits, and the redeeming mercy of Him whom Abraham was glad to behold from afar, for whose kingdom the code of Mount Sinai was given but to prepare the way; and who was adored, in His day of fleshly humility, by the glorified spirits of Elias and of Moses!

SERMON VI.

CHARACTER OF MOSES.

[Preached at Lincoln's Inn, Nov. 17, 1822.]

EXODUS iii. 14.

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM, *and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel,* I AM *hath sent me unto you.*

IN my discourse of last Sunday I endeavoured to establish the great antiquity of the Pentateuch, and the consequent credibility of the statement which it contains as to the situation, the character, and the personal history of Moses. I proved that the book in question was reverenced by the nations both of Judah and of Israel, from the time of their division into separate and hostile monarchies; that before this division, it was quoted by Solomon and by David, and alluded to in the almost contemporary history of Joshua; insomuch that no reasonable doubt can exist that the work which is now read in our churches is, in all essential points, the same with that which was a light to David's path, and which

regulated the solemn act of confederacy between Jehovah and his people in Gilgal[1]. And it is possible that, on this evidence alone, our belief in the Divine mission of Moses might be suffered to repose in safety. The events which his work records are such as, if untrue, no contemporary writer could have published without obtaining the name and treatment of a madman; while, if miracles be a sufficient test of a message from the Most High, few greater or less equivocal miracles can be named than are related in the books of Moses. I know it has been sometimes attempted to soften down these aweful dispensations into a chain of natural phenomena, insisted on and exaggerated beyond their actual amount or value by the fears of a superstitious crowd, and the fervour of oriental description. But it would be nó easy task to persuade a nation, however superstitious or ignorant, that they or their fathers had fed ón manna for forty years together, unless that production had really abounded to a degree which has never since been witnessed. And, however the sceptic may attempt to rid himself of the Egyptian plagues, the divided sea, and the cloudy pillar, yet if it may be granted, which no man denies, that the tribes of Israel were in the desert at all, the supply of food in such a situation (even during a far shorter time, and for a far less enormous multitude) must, apparently, involve a miracle.

[1] Psalm cxix. 105. Joshua xxiv.

But waving, for the present, such discussions, and assuming the truth of no other facts than those of which any competent historian may be well informed, and which no historian had any imaginable motive for misrepresenting, assuming only that Moses was really such a person as is described in his history; so born of Israelitish parents; so educated by an Egyptian princess; so long a resident in Arabia; and under such circumstances the preacher of such a theology; even from these facts alone, as recorded in the book of Exodus, a very cogent presumption arises that he was really an inspired messenger of the Most High. The reasons of this opinion I will now proceed to lay before you.

In the case of all pretensions to the prophetic character, our belief of their truth or falsehood will be, in a great measure, determined by the character and situation of the person who brings them forward. And if we find in his general conduct no tokens of weakness or enthusiasm, if we can discover in him no views of personal interest or aggrandisement, and if he be found, even to his own disadvantage, consistent in his pursuit of that object which he professes to follow, we are the more disposed to admit a possibility, at least, that his claim may be not without foundation. But as to the talents and genius of Moses, there can scarcely, with the readers of his work, be more than one opinion; an opinion ratified by the consent of all ages and all religious parties, from the sceptics of the present day, to those ancient heathen writers who ad-

mitted that the lawgiver of the Jews was a man of no common character, and who placed his name and his image amid the most illustrious of those illustrious men who had restrained the passions and improved the understandings of their fellow-creatures. Nor are his apparent fairness and candour less remarkable than his talents. On the contrary, there are few men who can possibly read over the last four books of the Pentateuch without being impressed by the little stress which its author lays on his own achievements; by the brevity observed on every subject not immediately connected with his mission, and the simplicity which relates, without concealment or extenuation, those facts which an artful advocate would have been likely to pass over in silence.

Of the first forty years of his life no more is told us than that he was brought up by Pharaoh's daughter. Of his situation and conduct during this period some few circumstances have reached us through other channels which, had it been the intention of the historian to give dignity to his own character, would, probably, have found a place in the narrative which I am now discussing. I will not, indeed, insist on all those traditionary honours with which the countrymen of Moses have, in later times, adorned him. I will not say with Josephus that, while yet a child, he trampled on the Egyptian diadem; that he led forth in his early youth a victorious army against Ethiopia, and engaged by his valour and personal accomplishments the affections

of a Nubian princess [1]. But there is certainly no improbability in the opinion that he may have held during this time a considerable rank under the Egyptian monarchy. Even the acute and not over-credulous Michaelis is disposed to believe that he served in the armies of Sesostris. Manetho, though for many reasons inclined to detract from his character, assigns him the rank of a priest in a country where the priests were all but sovereigns. And that tradition, at least, is confirmed by the inspired testimony of St. Stephen and St. Paul, which describes him as "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," as "mighty in word and deed," and as refusing to be adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, out of regard for the honour of the line of Abraham [2].

Of all these things, however, we find no mention in the book of Exodus. And while so strict a silence is maintained concerning the early achievements of Moses, the author speaks without reserve of his personal defects and failings; of his private quarrels with his kindred; of the unwillingness with which he, at first, undertook the message of the Most High; and of the indiscretion and want of faith which shut him out from the land of Canaan [3]. Surely this seeming candour and simplicity may, in itself, go far to conciliate our belief for many of the extraordinary things which he elsewhere relates to us.

1 Joseph. Ant. II. ix. x. Id. cont. Apion, I. 26.

2 Acts vii. 22. Heb. xi. 24.

3 Exod. iv. 10. iv. 1. Num. xx. 12. 24. Deut. iv. 21.

Nor, further, is it easy to discover what motive Moses can have had for counterfeiting a commission from Jehovah, or leading out, under such pretence, the tribes of Israel into the wilderness. We have no reason to believe that he was under any disgrace at the courts of Memphis or of Thebes, when he first, at the age of forty, took notice of his afflicted brethren[1]; nor have we any need of such a motive to account for a step which natural affection must have prompted; the wonder may rather seem to be that he had not visited them before. If, however, he at this time entertained any settled plans for their emancipation, it is evident that the first discouragement sufficed to make him abandon them. He sets them, indeed, an example of resistance to that oppression which ground them to the dust; or, to speak more accurately, a sudden burst of indignation impels him to a homicide, which, when committed, instead of glorying in, he is anxious to conceal. He endeavours, also, to reconcile their differences, and, apparently, to arouse them to a sense of that strength which arises from union. But their first ingratitude deters him from the attempt, and awakens him to a sense of his danger. He flies into a distant region of Arabia, where, during forty years, he continues entirely separated from his family, till, at an age when the fever of enthusiasm has generally passed away, and when men are seldom disposed or qualified for a

[1] Exod. ii. 11.

difficult and dangerous enterprise, he returns to the land where, if remembered at all, he was remembered as a murderer, to persuade an oppressive sovereign to permit a race of useful slaves to depart from serving him.

In all this there is surely no appearance of worldly cunning. Of worldly prudence there would be no appearance, unless the individual who thus acted had relied on a power beyond his own. In Egypt, at first, as the adopted son of a princess, an initiated member of the ruling caste, he had every motive to desire the continuance of an order of things so favourable to his views, whether of ambition or of indulgence, or (if such were his turn of mind) of tranquil and studious retirement. In Midian he was no needy adventurer. He was the son-in-law of a Shekh, entrusted with those flocks which are the Arab's most valued property; he had a wife and children; nor does there seem any sufficient reason why, at his advanced age, without such a call as he professed to have received, he should have left the romantic valleys of Horeb on a dangerous and toilsome journey [1]. And what, let me again enquire, was the object which he proposed to himself in that journey? There have, I know, been many instances in which the breast of the exile has been haunted by recollections of home,

[1] See Patrick on Exod. ii. 16. for the rank of Jethro. The beauty and luxuriance of the valleys of Horeb are forcibly represented by Niebuhr. Reisebeschreibung, tom. i. p. 294. et seq. And Müller. Univers. Hist. book ix. sect. 4.

and where his longing after the scenes of infancy and the friends of maturer age has dragged him back, through every hazard, to the land of his former happiness. But it was not in order to *remain* in Egypt that Moses sought to return thither. It was not to court again the favour of those whose parents had protected his helpless childhood; it was not to weave over again his ancient plans, if such he had entertained, of advancement in the state; it was not to renew his former studies, and to pass the short remnant of his days among his early associates in the sacred shades of Memphis or Heliopolis. He returned that he might lead forth a band of stubborn and degraded slaves into a wilderness, and invade, at their head, a well armed and warlike nation, "a people great and tall, and cities fenced up to Heaven[1]." Nor, even in his fullest tide of success, does his conduct intimate a selfish ambition, or so much as what might be called a natural desire for the interest and aggrandizement of his family. If he enjoyed, in some respects, the power of a king, yet was he a king without guards, without pomp, without wealth or luxury. In the administration of justice he voluntarily associated with himself the aristocracy of the tribes, and a council fortuitously chosen. For his own sons he obtained neither wealth, nor influence, nor dignity of any kind; and in allotting a hereditary priesthood to his brother's children, he divided its

[1] Deut. ix. 1, 2.

powers more accurately from those of the civil governor than was done in any other nation of antiquity [1].

But still, it may be said, though we allow that Moses may have been actuated by patriotism only, or by a generous thirst of fame, in his labours as a leader and a lawgiver, still he may, like Numa or Mango Capac, have pretended a Divine authority, in order to conciliate the respect, and compel the obedience of an ignorant and ferocious people. This has been the opinion usually professed by the more candid and philosophical unbelievers; and to this, even Josephus, in deference to his heathen readers, has given an undue degree of countenance [2].

But, had this been the case, a crafty lawgiver would certainly have selected that system of theology which was most adapted to the former prejudices of those whom he desired to persuade. At all events he would not have fixed on a scheme of faith and worship which increased, by its repugnance from all their previous habits, the unavoidable and inherent difficulties of his undertaking. The people

[1] The judge or civil magistrate was, by the original Mosaic constitution, supposed to be a layman, and, as such, distinguished from the priest. Deut. xvii. 9—12. And though the priest was his assessor, the authority of this last appears to have been only circa res sacras.

[2] Joseph. cont. Apion. Op. tom. ii. p. 482. τοιοῦτος μὲν δή τις αὐτὸς ἡμῶν ὁ νομοθέτης, οὐ γόης, οὐδ' ἀπατέων,——ἀλλ' οἷον παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησιν αὐχοῦσιν τὸν Μίνω γεγονέναι, καὶ μετ' αὐτὸν τοὺς ἄλλους νομοθέτας, κ. τ. λ.

to whom Moses came had sojourned for, at least, two centuries (perhaps for four) in a land of polytheists and idolaters. They are expressly said to have been addicted to those vanities of which the soil of Egypt was, through all ancient times, the foul and fruitful mother. There was no single point on which they were so much inclined to dispute the authority of Moses as on the observance of that pure and perfect theism which he laboured to introduce among them. When the prophet had been absent though but for forty days, he found them, on his return, adoring the Egyptian Apis, and his latter days were embittered by their headlong relapse into the worship of the idols of Moab. Nor do we need any further proof of their deep-rooted attachment to the superstitions of the land in which they had so long sojourned, than the fact that three fourths of the ritual laws enjoined them have reference to the customs of Egypt either as articles of peace, or as directly preventive and prohibitory. Under such circumstances, how gladly would a mere worldly legislator have suffered their religious blindness to remain undisturbed, while he concentrated his efforts to secure their temporal happiness; and have compounded for their false gods, so he himself might hope to be reverenced and obeyed as a deity!

But further, let us suppose that Moses might possibly have been actuated not merely by patriotism, but by such a degree of zeal for the doctrine of the Divine Unity as might induce, without personal in

terest, or personal ambition, a man of powerful mind and long experience to support a solemn truth through the instrumentality of a life-long imposture. Let us suppose all this (which of itself involves something very like a contradiction, and which is directly contrary to the practice of those sages of the western world who arrived, by whatever accident, at a knowledge of the one Almighty Being,) still it is plain that his sincerity alone would have gone no great way in commanding success; and that he not only taught such a doctrine, but eventually obtained its reception may, under such circumstances as I have mentioned, be well supposed to imply that he had really some extraordinary and supernatural means of persuading and compelling the acquiescence of those around him.

But, still more, what probability (I will say what possibility) was there that a man circumstanced like Moses, could, without a Divine Revelation, have invented a religious system which neither acknowledged a plurality of gods, nor admitted any visible symbol of the Deity?

Moses was educated, from his early childhood, by an Egyptian princess; he is represented by the Egyptians themselves as a member of their priesthood; learned in all their wisdom; exercised in all their doctrines; and embued, it must almost necessarily follow, with all their predilections and their prejudices. But though it is probable (as Jablonski has maintained) that, amid their gross superstitions, the Egyptians still preserved a dim and twilight

knowledge of the one Supreme Deity, yet is it certain that the service which belongs to Him alone they had alienated to whole armies of imaginary or evil demons; and that of all these subaltern immortals, as well as of the great God and Father of all, they had adopted the most absurd and degrading symbols.

Now, if the understanding of Moses had not been really enlightened by a supernatural effusion of knowledge, we should have expected in him either a warm defender of those systems in which he had been educated, or, at most, we should have expected his views of reformation to terminate with the correction or abscission of some few of their more disgusting extravagances. The doctrine of one supreme and of many inferior deities is, of all erroneous opinions, that which unassisted reason is least likely to refute; inasmuch as there is nothing in mere reason which forbids the possibility of a gradation of beings in the unseen world, to whom the government of God's works may be committed by Him, and who, therefore, as exercising a discretionary power over those beneath them, may be no improper objects of supplication or thanksgiving to those who are dependent on their will. And though the impropriety be more glaring which pictures God in a bodily form, and offers our prayers to the lifeless image; yet so prone is man to assist his fancy with these dangerous allies, that neither polytheism nor idolatry were discouraged or forsaken by those ancient philosophers who possessed the clearest views of the Divine Nature and Unity. It is thus

that Pythagoras begins his code of morals with an injunction to "worship the Gods" (in the plural number) "according to the Grecian law." It is thus that Plato, in his visionary republic, is actually intolerant and persecuting towards those, whoever they might be, who dissented from the popular idolatry[1]; and it is thus that even the wise and conscientious Socrates ended his life with an act of worship to an inferior deity. All these indeed, if not polytheists, were, in the Platonic sense of the word, most strictly and conscientiously polydæmonists; and none, however they might be disgusted with the particular symbols employed by the Egyptian mystics, have expressed any horror of visible representation in the abstract, whether of the lesser gods, or of the Great and Parent Divinity.

We find, indeed, but too well, from the corruption of many Christian Churches, how closely both polytheism and idolatry are entwined with the weakness of our mortal nature. We find, in the example of our Greek and Roman brethren, how strangely possible it is for the best hearts and the strongest heads, assisted by the clearest light of revelation, to persist, nevertheless, in practices and doctrines which generically, at least, if not specifically, resemble those which in the law of Moses are denounced as most displeasing to Jehovah. How then shall we account for the fact that the eyes of an Egyptian priest, four hundred years before the

[1] Plato: Phædo.

Trojan war, were open to those errors of which neither Pythagoras, nor Socrates, nor Plato, nor Porphyry, nor Bellarmine, nor Pascal, perceived the falsehood and vanity; unless we admit the solution, which that priest himself has given us, that God revealed to him those truths, which, when discovered, seem so obvious to the reason of man, but to discover which the unassisted reason of all mankind has been ineffectual.

Is it said that the knowledge which Moses thus imparted to others he might have himself received from his ancestors of the House of Israel, from those who had, perhaps, conversed with Levi, or who had retained some tradition of the fact that Jacob and Abraham had put away the Mesopotamian idols from their families? Let it be recollected that Moses was not brought up by his parents; from his infancy his education had been Egyptian, and till he was near forty years old, he seems to have had little, if any, intercourse with his enslaved and degraded countrymen; even these countrymen themselves, as is apparent from the book of Joshua, were addicted, at the time of their emigration from Egypt, to all the superstitions of that country[1]; and the probability is but small that Moses could have derived from them a system so pure and perfect as that which he enforced on their obedience in the wilderness. Nor have we any better reason than a tradition of the modern rabbins for

[1] Joshua xxiv. 14. Ezek. xxiii. 3. 8.

supposing that the tribe of Levi, or the family of Amram had escaped this general infatuation[1].

In the narrative, indeed, which Moses has given of his first vision in the valley of Horeb, he represents both his countrymen and himself as, to that moment, ignorant of the particular Deity who had been worshipped by their Syrian ancestors: "When I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, the God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say to me what is His name, what shall I say unto them[2]?" But if either the name of "Adonai," as appropriate to the Supreme Being, or of "El Shaddai," by which God had made Himself known to Abraham; or if the mere fact had been recollected that such a Divine Person, distinct and differing from the usual deities of the Egyptians, had been adored by their fathers, it is plain that neither the Israelites would have required an explanation of this kind, nor would Moses, in the event of their making the demand, have been unable to give them satisfaction. And, as no reason can be assigned why Moses, either in a real conversation with God, or in the narrative of a pretended conversation with Him, should have assumed an ignorance which he did not feel, it follows that he must, at this time, have been himself a

[1] Maimonides de Idololatria, I. § x. In mundo natio fuit quæ Deum novit, donec processere Israeli in Ægypto dies. Illic enim redierunt ad discendos illorum mores et idola exemplo eorum colenda, excepta tribu Levi.

[2] Exod. iii. 13.

polytheist as well as the Egyptians, and have imputed to some one of the many subordinate deities, and not to the one Almighty, the Glory before whose blaze he was standing.

We must, then, as I conceive, return to our late alternative; and if this vision were a fable, and if the theology which Moses taught were not supernaturally revealed to him, we must suppose an Egyptian priest, with all the disadvantages and prejudices of his age, his country, and his profession, to have invented a purer creed than either Socrates or Plato could conceive, and of which, with all their light, the practice of many Christian sects falls vastly short. And is not this more hard to believe than that the Most High, in pity to the blindness of His creatures, may have condescended to make known to them in person His Divine Nature, and the nature of that service which He requires from them? It may safely, then, be concluded, that the narrative of Moses is true, that the vision which he has described did really appear to him in Horeb, and that the message which he bore to his people was truly from the Almighty.

On the second of those points to which I have professed to call your attention, the Person, namely, who, under such a form and in such words addressed him, I should hardly have thought it necessary to bestow any time or argument; content with the determination of the most eminent Fathers, and the great body of the Christian Church, that He who is called by Moses, in one place, "Jehovah,"

and in another, "Jehovah's angel," is, in fact, no other than the Μεγάλης Βουλῆς Ἄγγελος of the early Christians; the מי מרא of the Rabbins, and the "Son of Man" of Daniel; the Person who, though Himself divine and mysteriously connected with the Deity, is yet the "Messenger," or "Angel," (the words have the same meaning,) by whom the unseen and unapproachable God has chiefly declared Himself to His creatures. That, however, has been asserted by some inconsiderate though zealous Christians, which, if true, would subvert the foundation of this faith, so ancient and so general, that a created angel may be employed by God to act in His name and represent His Person; and even that three angels thus deputed may be called God in Scripture, and adored as a fit symbol of the blessed and glorious Trinity [1]. I will, therefore, so far notice the subject as to urge on your consideration, first, that no created being can be a fit representative of the Infinite Creator; and that He who under so severe penalties has prohibited all idolatry, would never have encouraged His servants to regard any inferior being in the same light, under the same name, and with the same reverence as Himself. Yet this must have been the case had He been only a created Angel with whom Abraham pleaded for the pardon of the offending cities, in whose presence Moses and Joshua laid aside their sandals, and to whom are

[1] Parkhurst, &c.

assigned, in many passages of Scripture, the titles and the homage which God elsewhere demands as His own exclusive due.

But, secondly, the promise even of an earthly king is, both in the letter and the spirit, sacred. If he has flattered his subjects with the hopes of admission to his presence, it is certain that he must not mock their hopes with an unreal performance. He cannot, without prevarication, impose on their ignorance a servant masqued in his robes, the mimic of his state, and the empty phantom of his majesty. But whom did the elders of Israel go up into the mount to see? Who was it whose presence Moses prayed to look upon, and the skirts and passing train of whose glory were revealed to him as he lay beneath the rock in Horeb[1]? Was this any other than "the Lord gracious and mighty," the Eternal, the God of Israel? Then was the promise of the Most High of none effect, and His word to man made vain! Was it the God and Father of all? Why then is the same Person repeatedly called an angel? or, how has St. Paul declared by the Holy Ghost that "no man hath seen God at any time[2]. Surely there is no way to solve these difficulties, unless we admit that the Fountain of Deity Himself has never vouchsafed His presence to the eyes of men, but that it was the "God of God," the "Light of Light," the

[1] Exod. xxiv. 9, 10, 11. xxxiii. 18. xxxiv. 5, 6.

[2] 1 John iv. 12.

" Θεὸς Ἀληθινὸς ἐκ Θεοῦ Ἀληθινοῦ, the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father who has, on these occasions, declared Him."

Nor need we fear that, by referring these different manifestations of God's glory to the Second Person in the Trinity, we ascribe to the First in that mysterious union a state of epicurean repose, or exclude, either directly or by consequence " the supreme God from the government of the world." The objects of our adoration, though personally and officially distinct, are in nature and operation *One;* where any of the Three is, we acknowledge the whole Godhead to be in Him and working by Him; and we adore the Father and the Spirit in the visible glory of the Word, no less than in the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost, we conceive the will and power of the Father and the Word to have been made manifest.

It was, then, the Word of God, the Saviour of the world, who Himself, in after ages, was made flesh and dwelt among us, whose voice was heard, and fiery presence seen by Moses amid the rocks of Arabia. Nor can we require a stronger proof than this identity of operation under either covenant, of the connexion between every part of God's plan for the redemption of mankind; and that it was not enough for mankind to acknowledge the Divine commission of Moses, unless their veneration travelled on to His name of whom Moses spake, and for whose advent and sacrifice the institutions of Moses prepared the way. And it now only remains

for me to offer a few observations on the meaning of that title which the Lord, on this occasion, assumed. "I AM THAT I AM," and "I AM hath sent thee unto them."

It is evident that, in the first and most obvious application of the words, they were intended to correct that ignorance of the Divine Nature which possessed both the Israelites and Moses himself, and which prompted the latter to enquire what God that was of the many whom the nations worshipped who had undertaken the patronage and protection of the oppressed peasantry of Goshen? Was it Pthe, or Nuth, or On, the gods of Memphis and Heliopolis? Was it Chemosh the tutelary idol of Moab? Was it that spirit who, under the name of Baal, was believed to guide the chariot of the sun? Or Astarte the queen of Heaven? In answer to all such erroneous opinions, and to forbid all comparisons of the Divine Nature with any false or subaltern spirits, the answer of Jehovah is decided and satisfactory. It lays claim to a divinity solitary and unrivalled, to be the One *who is*, and from whom all other living things derive their secondary being; who can tolerate no partner in His throne, nor share His name and power with any inferior intelligence. "I AM hath sent thee unto them." It is, also, evident that by this phrase an everlasting being is denoted, a *now* without beginning or end; imperishable and which cannot be changed.

And hence two consequences follow. First, it was, as we have seen, the Word of God who took

to Himself this title, even as in after days, and during the time of His incarnation, He employed the same tense of precisely the same verb, "I Am" in asserting His own existence anterior to the birth of Abraham[1]. And, accordingly, by this text those Christians are convicted of error who suppose, with Arius, that Christ has had a beginning, or that in the Trinity which we worship any one is before or after the other.

The second inference is that aweful comparison between a temporal and eternal existence, which is so often enforced and enlarged on by the authors of the Sacred Volume as a motive for deep reverence toward God on the part of all God's creatures, and as an inducement to raise our thoughts above the limits of a perishable world, to Him in whose presence is deathless life, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore. "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the Heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure, yea all of them shall wax old like a garment, as a vesture shalt Thou change them and they shall be changed, but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end[2]."

If God then be eternal, how dreadful must His wrath be esteemed, whose power never passeth away, neither does His purpose change; who in the same light in which He views any action or thought

[1] St. John viii. 58. [2] Psalm cii. 25, 26, 27.

of ours to day, must continue to view it through countless ages; whose laws are without repeal, and His purposes, though from the first conditional on our actions, are, so far as He is Himself concerned, without repentance or shadow of turning! If God *is for ever*, how ill do we calculate in preferring to His love and protection the span of happiness which His visible creation can offer, the fashion of this world which is so soon to pass away into silence! Yea, rather, forasmuch as the things around us, which are all one day to be dissolved, are so goodly and glorious during their stage of momentary existence, "if God so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven[1];" if this earth which, ere long, must melt with fervent heat, is now so richly adorned with fruits and flowers by the lavish munificence of its Creator; if the firmament which is one day to wither like a parched scroll, is now set thick with suns, and all nature, even in this its ruined state, is teeming with whatever can supply the wants, whatever can delight the senses of us, poor exiles from Paradise; what may we not anticipate from the power and mercy of the Most High in that new Heaven and new earth, whose foundations shall be laid from everlasting, and where they whom He loves, and who have lovingly served Him shall be gathered as the wheat into His garner!

[1] Matt. vi. 30.

SERMON VII.

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH PHARAOH.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818.]

EXODUS ix. 16.

In very deed for this cause I have raised thee up, for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.

THESE words were spoken by Moses, in the name of God, to that unhappy king of Egypt who, for the visitations to which he was exposed, and his obstinate hardness under them, stands alone in the history of the ancient world, as a dreadful monument of the power of the Most High, and of the folly and perverseness of human nature. Ten times were plagues inflicted on himself and his people, the very least of which might have sufficed to humble the proudest heart, and awaken the most careless and incredulous spirit to attention, and conviction, and obedience. Ten times, while the hand of the Almighty as yet lay heavy on his land, did Pharaoh humble himself before Jehovah's prophet, and promise, with apparent sincerity, a complete and immediate compliance; and ten times did he fly back from his word so soon as his punishment was withdrawn, till the end was answered for which he had been endured so long, till the span was past

to which his guilt and his power were limited, and the chained sea was let loose to quench that frantic impiety which had seemed but to gather fresh strength from every former dispensation, whether of vengeance or of mercy.

All this, indeed, is strange, but this is not, to human ears, the strangest part of Pharaoh's history. Other fruitful lands, besides Egypt, have been, for a time, made barren through "the wickedness of them that dwelt therein[1]." Other nations, besides the children of Misraim, have smarted for their ruler's folly; and other kings, besides the one whose history we are now examining, have by their sins incurred the anger of Heaven, and by their blindness courted destruction. When Spain, by an opposite crime to that of the Egyptians in the time of Moses, expelled her Morisco brethren from those valleys which were, in their industrious hands, as another garden of Eden, how surely did she entail the curse of poverty on her soil, and in how legible and lasting characters has God's anger since been written on her rocks, her mountains, and her deserted fields! How strangely has the despotism of the Sultans reduced to an uniform barbarism and sterility the countries once most favoured by knowledge and genius, by nature and improvement; and how strangely have we ourselves beheld a bold, and wise, and wary conqueror entangled in those snares which his ambition was framing for mankind, and, in spite of warning to avoid his

[1] Psalm cvii. 34.

calamities, in spite of opportunity to retrieve them, despising security and empire in the pursuit of yet further power, and, like Pharaoh, incurring a ruin which lay before him in the broad book of nature, as calculable as the moon, and as certain as the return of the seasons!

In the great mass, indeed, of human misery, by whatever secondary cause produced, by the wickedness of mankind, or by the phenomena of nature, the plagues of Egypt may seem to sink into insignificance. Streams broader than the Nile flowed with a worse crimson to the sea, when Attila, the scourge of God, was suffered by His providence to pass the Danube, and when Timur laid waste the regions round Euphrates; and the human beings who miserably perished during the single expedition of Xerxes, may have exceeded many times the number of first-born children whom the wrath of Jehovah cut off on the night of the passover. A volcano, an earthquake, an inundation, a famine, or a pestilence, are agents of destruction more sweeping by far, though, from their comparative frequency, less aweful, perhaps, and terrible than those miraculous inflictions which are recorded in the early chapters of Exodus. Nor can it be regarded by the rational deist as in itself impossible, or as any probable impeachment of the Divine goodness, that the same Providence which, in the ordinary course of nature, dispenses, for wise and gracious purposes, these other and more formidable plagues, should, in a remarkable instance, and where the

honour of His name was concerned, have more lightly, though not more conspicuously, afflicted a particular sovereign and his subjects. These truths it is well and wise to bear in our constant recollection while we are reading of those dispensations which are emphatically called "the wars of the Lord" in the Old Testament[1]; both as evincing a close and constant analogy between the usual and natural operations of the Deity in the world, and those rarer instances in which His interference has been immediate and visible, and as proving that the objections which are often inconsiderately advanced against these last must, if well founded, extend further than their authors' desire: must detract from the general no less than from the particular Providence of God, and lay the axe to the root of natural as well as of revealed religion.

But it is not the amount of the calamities inflicted on Pharaoh and his subjects; it is not the obstinacy of Pharaoh under them; it is not the fact that these sufferings were inflicted by God as punishments of long-continued oppression, and in order to the deliverance of three millions of enslaved and overburthened peasantry, and the establishment of a nation who were to preserve His name and His prophecies, through a thousand years of darkness, to the birth of Him in whom all nations were to receive light; they are not these circumstances which are so much calculated to excite our astonishment and our unbelieving murmurs,

[1] Num. xxi. 14.

as the fact that the obduracy which called down these chastisements was itself the work of the Most High.

By God Himself it had been declared to Moses beforehand, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall not let the people go[1]." Of God Himself it is expressly and repeatedly asserted by His prophet, "And the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and the hearts of his servants." And in the words of the text we find the yet more explicit and, if possible, the yet more perplexing declaration that Pharaoh was absolutely raised up and placed, or continued, in his appropriate situation as a proper subject on whom, and at whose expense, the power of God might be displayed in the severest inflictions of His displeasure. "In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, that I might show in thee my power, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth."

This is a hard saying, unquestionably, and one which, as it has been generally understood, appears impossible to be reconciled with our natural and instinctive ideas of the justice and goodness of the Most High, no less than with many other and equally forcible passages of Scripture in which His dealings with mankind are spoken of and vindicated. To cause a man to sin, and then to punish him for sinning; to send warnings which are not even designed to produce an effect on him who receives them, and to create any sentient being for

[1] Exod. iv. 21.

no other purpose than to be guilty and miserable; this were a conduct which, as it would be horribly wicked in a finite intelligence, so it cannot without blasphemy be ascribed for a moment to the All-just, the All-wise, the All-merciful Father of nature!

Nor will the answer suffice which is sometimes rendered, in the words of St. Paul when speaking on a very different subject, namely, that we are all in the power of God as clay in the hands of the potter; that He may frame "one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour[1];" and that while some of His creatures may be originally set apart by His will for honour and happiness, there may be others destined by the same free pleasure to set forth His power and terrour.

For, in the first place, this argument, understand it as we please, will not apply to the difficulty under discussion, since the question is not of possibility or abstract right, but of probability, of analogy, of conformity to other declarations of God Himself. We do not ask whether God has the power, but whether He has the will to pursue the line of conduct imputed to Him; and if that conduct appears to us unjust or unmerciful, we are naturally led to conclude that, though God may do any thing which pleases Him, He will not please to do that which is repugnant to those attributes of His nature under which we know Him best, and by which He has most clearly revealed Himself to our adoration and our affection.

[1] Rom. ix. 21.

Nor do we gain any thing toward the removal of our difficulties by an addition of that system which Augustin brought into the Christian Church, and which, with some qualifying clauses calculated to soften its apparent rigour, is, to this day, the distinctive and favourite doctrine of no inconsiderable multitude of believers. It is no justification, it is no extenuation of a particular act of apparent injustice and cruelty, to say that it is one part of a vast scheme abounding in similar actions; that the Father of mercy (Great God! that man should thus presume to speak of Thee!) is not cruel to Pharaoh alone, but to the great majority of His creatures. Of the supporters of the system of Calvin, God forbid that I should speak otherwise than with respect and affection, as of our brethren and fellow-labourers in the Lord, and as of those who, with one single errour, hold the truth in a sincerity which no man can impeach, and in a godly diligence which may make too many of our party shed tears for our comparative supineness. Of the system itself I should desire to express myself with that caution which is due to the names of Augustin, of Calvin, and of Beza, of Jansenius, and of Pascal. But let God be true, even if every man be accounted a liar[1]! It is impossible that a system which, in its apparent consequences, destroys the principles of moral agency in man, and arraigns the truth and justice of Him from whom all truth and justice flow, it is impossible that a system of this kind can be from

[1] Romans iii. 4.

God, or can be well-pleasing to Him. The metaphysical difficulties, and they are many and grave, which perplex the Arminian hypothesis, may be inscrutable to our present faculties, or may be permitted to try our faith through the whole course of this mortal pilgrimage. But though we should be unable to reconcile them with the power and wisdom of God, it is evident that they leave His mercy and His truth unimpaired; and they are these last which of all God's attributes are the most important to His fallen creatures, inasmuch as they are these last, and these last alone, which give us hope of sanctification in this world, and of happiness in the world which is to succeed it!

But I have said that, in that passage of St. Paul which is urged as a solution of the history of Pharaoh, the apostle is treating of a very different subject. A reference indeed to the tenth chapter of Romans may convince us, as I conceive, that it is not the election of one individual and the reprobation of another to eternal life or to eternal misery, but the appointment of different nations to different parts in the general scheme of God's providence, which is the scope and purport of his argument; that not Jacob and Esau, but Israel and Edom, not Cornelius and Caiaphas, but the Gentile and the Jew, not the final sentence of individuals in the life to come, but the admission or rejection of large bodies of men from certain blessings and privileges in the world which now is, which only is the topic under disscussion. And it becomes us, therefore, to

seek some different solution of the present problem than that which is usually drawn from the absolute sovereignty of Jehovah.

Accordingly, there are others who maintain that when God is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart, nothing more is intended than that He suffered him to harden his own heart, that He left him to the natural consequences of his own unbridled pride and passion, and did not interpose with His gracious influences to soften and subdue that corruption of his nature which of itself was sufficient, without further aid, to overpower not only his better principles, but his natural prudence and discretion. And this interpretation they support by several remarkable passages in the same chapters of Exodus to which I have already referred, and which ascribe to Pharaoh himself and his own agency that induration which, as we have seen, is in others ascribed to the Lord. Thus, it is said of Pharaoh, in the seventh chapter and the twenty-third verse, that "he did not set his heart" to profit by the warnings which had been given him. It is said in the eighth chapter, that "when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart and hearkened not unto them[1];" and at the end of the same chapter, that "Pharaoh hardened his heart" after the plague of the flies also[2]. Nay more; they urge, that in the only place in the seventh chapter where, according to our translation, the Lord is said to have "hardened Pharaoh's heart[3]," the original and all the best

[1] Ver. 15. [2] Ver. 32. [3] Ver. 13.

versions say merely, that "the heart of Pharaoh was hardened." And they conclude that, even if God had meditated the ruin of the Egyptian king, it is apparent that nothing more was necessary than thus to leave him to himself, inasmuch as the All-wise knew beforehand, and had beforehand declared to Moses, the obstinate and perverse spirit to whom the prophet was His messenger. "I am sure," said the Lord in Horeb, "that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand[1]." Accordingly they urge, that Pharaoh himself was the only agent in his own destruction, and that it was the foreknowledge, not the predetermination of the Most High, which induced Him thus to express Himself.

In all this there is doubtless much which is true, but to the peculiar difficulties of the case it can scarcely be said to be relevant. The passages which are alleged to favour this opinion, and where Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart, and not to have set his heart to understand the will of the Lord, will only prove, (what the most unbending Calvinist does not deny) that the immediate cause of Pharaoh's hardness and impenitence is to be sought for in his own perverse will, and his own ungoverned passions. If we cast a cripple into a pool, it is vain to pretend that our hand is not upon him, and that he sinks through the infirmity of his limbs which prevents his swimming. And, if God placed Pharaoh in a situation where, without repentance, he must needs be undone,

[1] Exodus iii. 19.

while He withheld from him that grace without which no man can repent, it is evident that the Almighty's pleasure was, if not the immediate, yet doubtless, the primary and efficient cause of his destruction.

Nor does there seem any sufficient reason for a yet minuter distinction which has been made by some learned and ingenious men, that, during the earlier plagues, it was still in the power of Pharaoh, through grace, to awaken to his true interests, and humble himself with an effectual and prevailing repentance; and that it was not till after the plague of the boils that the decree of God went forth against him, and his heart was sealed up in impenitence. According to these commentators, who are certainly here, as in the former instance, countenanced by the earlier versions, the word which we render "raising up," will more properly signify "preserved," and the sense will be that Pharaoh, having provoked God by his obstinacy under the seven former inflictions, would have been destroyed in the eighth if he had not been spared for another and a more exemplary punishment. But, in the first place, it is certain that before Moses had seen Pharaoh at all, the Almighty had already assigned as a reason why even the first plague would not be effectual, that "He" (Jehovah) would harden the king of Egypt's heart; and as there is no appearance that any of the plagues but the last, however troublesome and alarming, were of a mortal nature, it is not easy to say how Pharaoh had been pecu-

liarly preserved or spared in calamities which he shared with the meanest of his subjects.

On the whole, then, we must grant that God does really represent Himself as the cause of Pharaoh's frantic disobedience, no less than of the ruin to which that disobedience conducted him; and we must also discover some better and more relevant method of vindicating God's justice and mercy in such a transaction, than that appeal which the followers of Calvin have made to His absolute and unbounded sovereignty. And such a vindication may, I trust, be obtained by a due attention to the following particulars.

First, it is not asserted in the present text, or in any other part of Scripture, that God *created* Pharaoh or brought him first into the world as a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction. God does not say, "for this cause have I predestined thee to be born into the world, that thou mightest rebel against me, and by that rebellion purchase to thyself everlasting punishment to the praise of my justice." This He does not say. He only assures him, that "for this cause He had raised him up," according to our translation; but according to the most approved ancient versions, "preserved, continued, or spared him." That is, that either He had first made him king, and seated him on the throne of Memphis, or had endured him there, in spite of his crimes, as a proper person upon whom, in that elevated situation, might be displayed the judgements which God is accustomed to inflict on the oppressive and impenitent.

We are not authorized to suppose that the unbridled passions and frantic obstinacy which made Pharaoh a fit subject for this aweful and exemplary chastisement, were, from the first and in the early part of his life, invincible and involuntary. We are not even to suppose that the peculiar situation of life into which he was thrown had a necessary tendency to render him obstinate and furious. God forbid! God Himself hath told us that He tempteth no man, and that He hath no pleasure in the death of him who perisheth for his sins. The wickedness of Pharaoh was his own; but, being already impious and cruel, having already offended to a sufficient degree against the light of natural religion, having already, to a sufficient degree, resisted and grieved that good Spirit whose gracious helps and comforts are, for Christ's sake, offered to all, he was placed or continued by Divine Providence in a rank of which he was unworthy, both as a means of punishment to the sinful nation under his sway, and that he himself, by the greatness of his fall, might afford to other men a more effectual warning. In His anger God gave a king to Egypt, in His wrath He took him away, and Pharaoh was raised up on high,

"ut lapsu graviore ruat[1]!"

But, secondly, we have no reason to conclude from Scripture that the consequence of his obstinacy in

[1] Claudian: in Ruf. iii. 23.

the present instance was any other than a temporal punishment, nor that even this punishment was made heavier, though it was certainly made more conspicuous, than that which his former sins had demanded. "There are," says Jeremy Taylor, "there are many secret and undeserved mercies," —"of which men can give no account till they come to give God thanks at their publication, and of this sort is that mercy which God reserves for the souls of many millions of men and women concerning whom we have no hopes, if we account concerning them by the usual proportions of revelations and Christian commandments, and yet we are taught to hope some strange good things concerning them by the analogy and general rules of the Divine mercy." "He that usually imposes less, and is loth to inflict any, and very often forgives it all, is hugely distant from exacting an eternal punishment when the most that He threatened and gave notice of was but a temporal. The effect of this consideration I would have to be this, that we may publicly worship this mercy of God which is kept in secret, and that we be not too forward in sentencing all heathens and prevaricating Jews to the eternal pains of hell, but to hope that *they* have a portion in the secrets of the Divine mercy, where also, unless many of *us* have some little portions deposited, our condition will be very uncertain and sometimes most miserable."

But be this as it may, there is no reason to believe that Pharaoh was the more severely punished,

either in this world or the world to come, for what he did under judicial hardness. The ruin which he met with was what his previous crimes had called for. The sufferings which befel his subjects, their own sins had justly merited; and all which God describes Himself as doing was to suspend awhile the appointed vengeance; to endure some little space the vessel of wrath fitted for destruction, that the blow when it came might be more exemplary to others, and might be more certainly ascertained as the infliction of Almighty displeasure.

Nor is this all, for thirdly, the hardening of the heart, (which is a very common expression in Scripture) to those who recollect the opinion of the ancient Hebrews as to the seat of the reasoning faculties, is familiarly known to signify, not only an increase of obstinacy and impious resolution to resist the power of God, and the dictates of religion and mercy, but a confusion, moreover, of the natural understanding; a blindness to our visible interest, a mad contempt of consequences, and that perverse and furious folly, which, like the hunted boar, presses with the greater violence on the spear that pierces him.

It was not the wickedness of Pharaoh alone which could have prevented his perceiving, as his counsellors are expressly said to have perceived, that "Egypt was destroyed[1]" by his repeated prevarication with Moses. His natural reason, had he

[1] Exodus x. 7.

retained the use of it, must have sufficiently instructed him in the prudence of yielding in time, nor can we ascribe his perseverance to any other cause than that which the heathen themselves have recognized as a part of the ordinary system of providence, that "quos vult perdere prius dementat," that God makes those men mad whom He designs to bring to ruin.

There is, it should be recollected, and in the nature of things there must be, a period, how late soever, when the patience of the Almighty is at an end, and that grace is withdrawn which, had they made a timely use of it, would have opened the gates of mercy to the worst and most grievous offenders. But when the day of grace is over, it is of little consequence to the criminal, though to those who are to profit by his example it may be a matter of the greatest importance, and of exceeding wisdom and mercy, by what process of judicial infatuation or of providential circumstances the criminal is restrained from escaping the determined ruin. "The king of Egypt," the righteous God might say, "hath long and grievously offended me. Like others, he had once his day of grace, in which my Spirit was not withheld, and in which he might have found the gates of repentance and acceptance open. But my Spirit shall not always strive with man; and that I have endured this wicked man so long is not in tenderness to him, but as a part of his punishment, and that his punishment might be more public and terrible. To

this end I have raised him up to a throne of which he is unworthy; to this end I have deprived him not only of the grace which he despised, but of that natural reason which, even on worldly grounds, might have taught him to avoid the destined punishment. Let others learn from him that not only holiness but wisdom is mine to give or to withhold; and that he who seeks not after the one, may be made in the end to mourn the deprivation of the other. Thus have I hardened his heart by confusing his understanding; by withdrawing the only check which remained on his furious and unruly passions; and by leaving him to the consequences of those counsels which he originally preferred to the light of natural religion and the whispers of natural mercy."

From the case of Pharaoh, however, thus stated and explained, some very important practical corollaries may be derived for the instruction of believers.

We may learn, in the first place, from this memorable history, of how little positive advantage are those objects which the world most covets, such as wealth, and length of days, and elevated station, when we behold them, in the present instance, assigned to a wicked person in no strain of benediction, in no feeling of indulgence, but as tokens of anger and a part of his intended punishment. It was a knowledge of this truth which prevented David from murmuring at the prosperity of the ungodly, seeing, that by lifting them up

above the sons of men, the Almighty did, in fact, nothing else than set them in slippery places; that their rank and power served only to render them more conspicuously miserable, and was the scaffold on which they mounted that the world might behold their execution. So certain is it that the gifts of the Almighty are good or evil according to the persons on whom they are bestowed; and so carefully ought we to govern our lives, lest "our tables be made a snare to us, and that which should have been to our welfare, become a trap[1]."

It is, secondly, a very aweful consideration which arises from the present and many similar passages of Scripture, that men, while they yet live, may have so far exceeded the patience and long-suffering of God, as that His Spirit continues to strive with them no more, but that they are abandoned to their impenitent hearts, and, even in this world, are already sentenced. Such, as we have seen, appears to have been the case with Pharaoh; such, we certainly know, was the condition of those Jews over whom our Saviour lamented that "the things which belonged to their peace were thenceforth hidden from their eyes," and of whom Isaiah had formerly testified, that "the Lord would make their hearts gross, and their ears dull of hearing;" such those were for whom, inasmuch as they had sinned the "sin unto death," St. John forbids us to pray; such those of whom St. Paul declares that

[1] Psalm lxix. 22.

it is impossible to quicken them unto repentance; and that no more remaineth unto them "but a certain fearful looking for of judgement" to come, and the expectation of those torments of which the fears are but the sad beginning[1].

This is a dreadful picture. But those, if any such hear me, who have attended the sick or the dying; who have endeavoured to quicken to repentance men dead in trespasses and sins; will but too surely bear me witness that the case which it represents is not exaggerated or uncommon. There are those who, having long neglected prayer, are at length, even when roused to a sense of their danger, unable so to compose their thoughts as, in an orderly and acceptable manner, to ask mercy from their offended Creator. There are those who appear to have lost even the perception of right and wrong; men so long accustomed to evil that the very thoughts of Heaven are more painful to them than those of hell! How often do we meet with aged men who, tottering on the brink of the grave, pursue the sinful follies of youth, not for any pleasure they derive from them, but to shut out, by their means, the more dismal thoughts of futurity! how often those who tremble at the wrath to come, without resolution to attempt an escape from it, and by whom the calls of religion are answered in no other light than as coming to torment them before the time!

[1] St. Luke xix. 42. St. Mat. xiii. 15. 1 St. John v. 16. Heb. x. 27.

And these had once their day of grace! these once experienced the blessed visits of God's Spirit! these once heard the voice of their Father most lovingly calling them to repentance! Yea, for these Christ died, and for these, had not themselves rejected the privilege, the gates of Heaven would have rolled back on their starry hinges, and there would have been joy for their reception among the angels of God Most High!

Oh, my brethren, while yet you feel within you a wholesome remorse for sin, a desire to escape from its snares, and those other gracious tokens of God's presence in the heart by which we are moved and enabled to amendment, delay not for a moment to profit by that acceptable time, and to make, while it is called to-day, the day of salvation your own. They are grievously deceived who fancy that, because they are now able to repent, they may repent when they please. The ability, it should never be forgotten, the ability comes from God alone; and the same God whose Spirit now strives in our hearts to overcome our evil nature, has solemnly threatened that His "Spirit shall not always strive with men [1]!"

Lastly, let us admire the wisdom and power of the Most High, who can make even such men as I have described the instruments of His exalted pleasure; the means of declaring His name through the earth, and His ministers for good to those whom

[1] Gen. vi. 3.

He sees fit to favour. Not only was the obstinacy of Pharaoh turned into a means of perfecting more entirely the deliverance of the oppressed nation of Israel; to the Egyptians themselves their sufferings were, eventually, most beneficial, inasmuch as their land was freed thenceforth from a race whose power, and number, and different origin had long made their presence obnoxious and dangerous; and since, thenceforth, for above six hundred years, the neighbour nations of Egypt and Israel, as if mutually awed by the judgements which had separated them, remained (a solitary instance in the history of the world) in unbroken peace with each other.

But this is not all! The exemplary punishment of the wicked is a blessing to all those who receive the solemn warning which it conveys. Where the history of Pharaoh is known, his name is a lesson to men how they disobey the will and slight the judgements of their Maker; and we know not how many millions, from the north and south, and east and west, have been snatched from the wrath to come by the merited sufferings of this one unhappy tyrant!

SERMON VIII.

ON THE DECREES OF GOD.

[Preached in the Cathedral of St. Asaph, 1819.]

St. Luke xix. 42.

If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes!

These are the affecting words of our Saviour on His last visit to Jerusalem, when, attended by the mighty multitude of those Galileans who had seen His miracles, He entered as the Son of David and the King foretold by the prophet Zechariah into that city and temple of His earthly and His Heavenly Father, which were shortly after destined to flow with His blood, and to be given up, in consequence, to the vengeance of God, and to be a curse to all posterity. As thus attended He came down the steep descent of the Mount of Olives, which overlooks Jerusalem, "He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes! For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and

shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

This was not the only instance in which our Lord uttered the like complaint of the disobedience of His people, and the like prophecy of their approaching calamities. Within a few days after, in the temple, He foretold that of all those goodly buildings not one stone should be left on another; and He exclaimed, with the same affectionate earnestness and compassion, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate [1]."

How truly these prophecies were fulfilled the writings of the heathen and of the Jews themselves instruct us. Within forty years after the crucifixion of our Lord, the Romans came against the city at the time of the passover, when the great multitude of the nation were gathered from all parts within its walls. They literally "cast a trench around it, and kept it in on every side," suffering no man to go in or out; insomuch that, for the famine which arose, the bodies of the slain were cut up and devoured, and women ate their own chil-

[1] St. Matt. xxiii. 37, 38.

dren. They "laid the city even with the ground," and even ploughed up the foundations of the temple; and destroyed the wretched inhabitants with so great a slaughter, that three millions of men, women and children in the town and the neighbouring country are said, by the Jews themselves, to have perished either by famine or the sword.

Now at the time that this prophecy was delivered, it is hardly too much to say that there was no more appearance or likelihood of the event occurring, than if the same dismal calamities were now foretold of London. The whole world was at peace. Jerusalem was quietly under the government of the Romans who could, therefore, have no interest in destroying it; and so little disposition did the Jews, at this time, shew to rebel against them, that they absolutely were, in all appearance, mainly led to the crucifixion of our Lord by the fear lest the Romans should take offence at His success with the people. If Christ, then, foreknew and foretold this destruction, He foreknew and foretold that which He could have derived from no human wisdom, and must, therefore, have been a prophet of God.

Nor can it be pretended that, after the last great ruin of Jerusalem had really taken place, this prophecy was falsely ascribed to our Lord by His apostles and evangelists. In the first place, let any of you consider how difficult it would have been, while many of those Galileans were still alive who had heard our Saviour's preaching, to make men believe that, at so solemn and public a time, and in the case

of a prophecy so remarkable, our Lord had used words which they who heard Him as well as the apostles, did not remember. Suppose that some great and famous preacher from a distant country were to perform in the streets of London even a tenth part of the wonders which our Lord performed in Jerusalem. Supposing the eyes of all men to have been drawn to him on some one solemn occasion, on which he entered into the city at the head of his disciples, and preached to them an affecting sermon on his own fate and on their duties; would it be safe for any person, in writing the life of such a man twenty or thirty years afterwards, to say that he had, on that particular occasion, publicly foretold the destruction of the town, when, in truth, he had said nothing like it? Would not all those who had been present exclaim "we remember that discourse as well as you can, and we are sure that the prophet never used the expressions which you impute to him." How then could St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John venture to do that which no man in his senses would, in this country, venture on?

But, further, it may be asked, "How, if our Lord did not really deliver this prophecy, how did His evangelists know that Jerusalem was shortly to be laid in ashes?" That of those evangelists the first three, at least, if not all four, must have written their gospels before Jerusalem was destroyed, is certain not only from abundant internal evidence which proves that these works were written while Jerusalem was

yet standing; but from the fact in which all ancient writers agree, that St. Matthew, St. Luke, and St. Mark were themselves dead before those calamities came to pass. Either, then, they must have taken their knowledge of that future destruction from the preaching of their Master, or they must have had the gift of prophecy themselves. But if they were, themselves, the prophets of the Most High, we cannot apprehend that they would have told a falsehood in imputing to their Master words which He never uttered. It follows then, so certainly as to leave no cause of doubt with any reflecting mind, that Jesus of Nazareth really uttered the words which are here given to Him; that He must, therefore, have been inspired by God, and (since God would never inspire a man with miraculous knowledge in order to establish a lie) that we may be sure He was, as He professed Himself, the Son of God, the Saviour of Israel and of the world.

From the fact, then, of these words having been uttered by our Lord, and having received after His death their exact accomplishment, we may draw a greater certainty of faith in Him, and confirm our obligation to obey Him and keep His commandments.

But, from the words themselves, as they have been read to you in my text, some very important consequences follow which it shall be the object of my present discourse to explain to your understandings, and apply to your consciences, inasmuch as they greatly illustrate the manner of God's ordi-

nary dealings with sinners, and afford an aweful warning to us all not to slight the opportunities of repentance. "If thou hadst known," said Christ to His guilty city, "if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes! For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation!"

From these affecting words the following facts may, I think, be pretty clearly learned. First, that there had been a time in which those citizens of Jerusalem, whose hearts were now hardened against Christ, and whose hands were shortly after dipped in His blood, there had been a time during which they might, if they pleased, have believed on Him to their own salvation and the security of their country. Secondly, that this time was now passed away, and that it was no longer in their power to perceive the truth and to flee from the wrath to come. And, thirdly, that the blindness of heart which now possessed them, and which was so soon to hurry them into the commission of the most dreadful crime which the world ever witnessed, was, in itself, a fearful instance of God's anger against them, and a sure forerunner of the destruction to which they were already sentenced.

The first of these positions is established by those words of our Lord. "If thou hadst known," or as the original might be rendered, "Oh that

thou hadst known the things which belong to thy peace!" He does not say "Oh that it had been at any time *possible* for thee to have known them!" But, "Oh that thou hadst but known them, that thou hadst but set thy heart to learn them, that thou hadst only paid that reasonable and honest attention to them which they claimed from thee!" This would not have been said of those who had been, by a decree of God from all eternity, given over to inevitable hatred of the light, and to a total want of power to receive its beams. We should not say to a man blind from his birth "Oh that you had seen the sun rise this morning!" but, "Oh that you *could* have seen it!" The turn of the expression is only proper when applied to a person who lay under no natural want of power to do the thing spoken of; and we, therefore, conclude that the Jews might, if they had so pleased, have known the things which belonged unto their peace and have acted accordingly. And this is yet plainer from a comparison of the expressions "in *this* thy day," and "*now* they are hid from thine eyes," and "because thou knewest not the *time* of thy visitation."

For if a decree of God had passed from the beginning that certain only, a few in comparison of the Jews, should, by irresistible grace, have their hearts turned to believe on their promised Saviour, while all the rest should be passed by, and left in a total incapacity to accept the salvation which was offered to them, it is plain that these last could

not have been properly said to have any day of salvation at all, and that it would have been the greatest injustice imaginable to give as a reason for the severities which were to be exercised on them, that "they knew not the *time* of visitation," when it was never possible for them to know it. Nor is it easy to discover why our Lord should say of the Jews that "*now*," when He thus spake, "the things which belonged to their peace were hidden from their eyes," unless the time had been wherein those things were *not* hidden from them. When I say it is *now* too late to attempt any thing, I certainly give my hearers to understand that the thing might once have been possible, since otherwise, whether *now* or *then*, the case would have been the same, and there would be no propriety in expressing any distinction. We may conclude, accordingly, that even to those Jews who, when Christ spake this, were sentenced to destruction, there had been afforded a sufficient opportunity wherein they might, except through their own fault, have entered into the Kingdom of God, and have become the heirs of life everlasting.

And since we have no reason to suppose that God's dealing with that generation of vipers was at variance or inconsistent with the general course of His spiritual work on the souls of men, I conclude that every sinner has some acceptable time, in which the mercy of God is, not in name only nor in mockery, but effectually offered to him, in which his day of visitation, the things which belong

to his peace are not hidden from his eyes; and in which he might, unless through his own single and wilful obstinacy, discern and follow the path of salvation.

Let no man mistake my meaning! I do not say that the time can be found in which the sinner, by his own natural strength and unassisted faculties, can either obtain or follow after salvation. I know that we are by nature incapable of any good thing; that the old man is, in his very constitution, in continual enmity against God; and that either to will or to do what God requires altogether surpasses our powers, unless both the preventing and assisting grace of God's Spirit descend on the soul both to give us, in the first instance, "a good will," and to "work with" and support our endeavours after salvation when we have that will. But this I maintain, and I maintain it, as on many other passages of Scripture, so particularly on the grounds of the present text, first, that some such time or times of gracious visitation is accorded by God to all His creatures, wherein He gives them the power and opportunity of forsaking the bondage of sin for the glorious liberty of His children; and further (which follows from the universality of the gift, and from the particular instance of the Jews here mentioned by our Saviour) that this gift may be resisted and rendered vain, and has been thus frustrated and resisted by the personal fault and wilful hardiness or negligence of all those who, like these Jews, are finally suffered to perish. And it follows that the

Calvinists are mistaken in maintaining either the absolute election of a few, to the passing over or reprobation of the greater number of mankind, or that the saving grace of God, wherever given, is always irresistibly exerted to the conversion and final salvation of those whom it once condescends to visit.

But that the power of repentance and faith thus given to all is altogether unconnected with our own strength and faculties; that it is of God's free-will to give or to withhold; and that when this is withheld, no outward opportunities of knowledge or conviction can profit us any thing, is also certain from the same example of the citizens of Jerusalem, from whose eyes, after they had once enjoyed for a sufficient time the power of "seeing the things which belonged unto their peace," those things were for ever hidden. It was not that Christ had, at the time when He thus spoke, withdrawn His visible presence from them. His miracles were still wrought in their streets, His preaching was still heard in the courts of their temple, His promises of love and blessedness were still held out to all that should put their trust in Him; the fountain of His atoning blood was shortly after offered, and His body given for the sins of the world.

But from that presence *they* derived no blessing; those miracles, that preaching, those promises, were for *others*, not for *them;* the atonement of His sacrifice was to *them* a savour of death; *their* day of grace was gone by, and there remained no more for

them than a fearful looking for of judgement to come, and the gleams of that unquenchable fire to which they, every day, were drawing nearer!

My brethren, there are those even now, and God grant that their number may not be greater than many of us imagine; there are those even now whom preaching cannot move, whom friendly counsel cannot amend, whom example and experience have no power to alter, who are beyond the reach of other men's prayers, and whose hearts refuse, even in their hours of greatest terrour, to utter a prayer for themselves. Some of these have outlived the pleasures of life, yet perish in its sins simply because they cannot forsake them; they are not altogether insensible to their danger, but they cannot stop, though hell gapes wide before them; like an ox to the slaughter they pass on, or a beast to the snare, the heartless, hopeless, joyless slaves of sin, and the heirs of torment unspeakable! And these men had once, like those Jews, their day of visitation; these men had once the power given them, if they had seized on and improved it to the best advantage, of becoming through Christ the children of God, and with Him the heirs of everlasting glory! What might they then have been? What are they now? What must they soon become?

Oh ye who yet feel the comfortable whispers of God's Spirit in your souls, whose consciences yet warn you when you fall into sin, and to whom the power is yet allowed, when you have the inclination,

to apply your souls to prayer and the study of the Scriptures, deal not, I beseech you, with the Holy Ghost as Felix dealt with Paul, saying, "Go thy ways now, when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee [1]." The Spirit of God will not always strive with men; He will not come exactly when we call Him, when we have often already sent Him away; and if ye neglect the opportunities of effectual salvation which are now presented, the time may soon come in which "ye shall desire to see one of these days of the Son of Man, and shall not see it [2]." Improve, then, to the utmost of your ability, the grace already vouchsafed to you; it is not your own; it may be withdrawn at any time; and it will be taken away from that unprofitable servant who hides in a napkin the bounty of his Heavenly Master.

Nor, if an additional motive could be required to the timely availing ourselves of God's spiritual aid, can a stronger be conceived than that which is the last conclusion which follows from the words of my text, namely, that the deadness and blindness to all spiritual impressions of which I am speaking, is generally the forerunner of some signal vengeance of God, and almost always great in proportion to the degree of spiritual advantages which the sufferer has formerly enjoyed and neglected. The blindness which happened to Israel, the grossness of their hearts, and the dullness of their ears were

[1] Acts xxiv. 25. [2] St. Luke xvii. 22.

such as to us appear almost beyond belief. And were not their spiritual advantages, the works which were done among them, the warnings given them, the revelations communicated to them, at one time altogether as remarkable? And what nation hath the earth ever seen whose destruction was so signal and attended with so much misery as theirs?

Oh may we so shun their obstinacy as that we may not be given over to their blindness, but that we may know, in this our day, the things which belong unto our peace before they are hid from our eyes, before the evil days come and the years in which we shall say we have no pleasure in them [1], and before that dreadful day in which we may cry to the God of mercy in vain for pardon and succour, when the sleep of death and the senseless doze of unbelief and licentiousness shall be rent in pieces, once for all, by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God's judgement!

[1] Eccles. xii. 1.

SERMON IX.

THE EXTENSION OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

[For the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Preached at Shrewsbury, 1821.]

DANIEL xii. 3.

And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

THESE words are found in one of the most striking prophecies on record of the time and manner of the Messiah's coming; and they should seem to point out to us very clearly the two-fold duty which that advent laid on mankind, namely, that of profiting in their own persons by the religious knowledge thus laid within their reach, and that of communicating to others, less favourably circumstanced, the light in which all are equally interested. "They," said the angel to the prophet, "that be wise," that is, who are in their own persons wise unto salvation, "shall shine" in the last day "as the brightness of the firmament," and they who make others wise in the same manner, who "turn many to righteousness," and to a saving and purifying knowledge of the Most High, shall shine forth as "the stars for ever and ever."

The first of these duties, that of labouring in our own persons to acquire the true wisdom of which the prophet is speaking, is a duty of such obvious necessity in itself, and so strongly enforced in many passages of Scripture, that, with a Christian audience, few arguments are required to demonstrate its absolute necessity. We cannot come to Christ without believing in His name. We cannot believe on Him without knowing Him. We cannot know Him as He is, and as He should be known, without appreciating highly the dignity of His nature, the wisdom of His laws, and all which He has done and suffered for us. And, though an outward confession of these illustrious truths is by no means inconsistent with much general inattention to the doctrines and duties of religion, yet they are greatly mistaken who expect to be able either to know God satisfactorily, or to believe in Him sincerely, or, truly and heartily and practically, to love Him with that degree of affection which He demands from us, without a diligent and frequent study of His works and His attributes as described in the sacred volume; without a frequent approach to Him and converse with Him through the channels of prayer and meditation; and without a diligent use of those appointed means of grace which chiefly have power to kindle in the heart those affections to which, and to which only, the God of love and wisdom is accustomed to reveal Himself as a Creator, a Redeemer, and a Sanctifier. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them,

he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him[1]."

It is apparent, then, that for the adequate discharge of the first-mentioned duty, some greater pains are necessary than are comprised in an acquisition of the first rudiments of Christian knowledge, and that both diligence and devotion are required if we would really be found among that number to whom the praise of true knowledge belongs, or whose wisdom, in the great day of the Messiah, is to shine forth as the brightness of the firmament. Nor is the caution superfluous even to the wisest and best informed of those who have assembled on the present occasion with the benevolent design of enlightening the darkness of their fellow-creatures, that it behoves them, while they care for others, to bestow some thought on themselves; to recollect that, if they neglect the care of their own souls, the attention which they pay to the souls of others can do nothing else than make their folly or hypocrisy the more conspicuous, and that it is in vain to unfold the Bible to their brethren while it remains in their own closets a sealed and neglected volume.

But enough has been said (and as much as the immediate occasion of my addressing you will admit of) on this evident and primary duty. It remains that I should examine into the extent and

[1] St. John xiv. 21.

obligations of that second and less obvious branch of the Christian character, for the display of which so brilliant a reward is promised in the latter part of the verse which has been read to you. If of them who are, themselves, wise unto salvation it is foretold, that they shall "shine as the brightness of the firmament," to them who apply that wisdom to the advantage of their fellow-creatures a more illustrious blessedness is assigned, their glory is to be that of those heavenly bodies to which the firmament owes its lustre, "and they that turn many to righteousness" are to be "as the stars for ever and ever."

The duty of assisting to the best of our power, and in conformity to the station where God has placed us, in the dispersion of ignorance, in the propagation of truth, and the extension of the knowledge and power of that glorious Gospel, which was the latest legacy of the Messiah to all the nations of the world; this duty I have called a less obvious branch of the Christian character, because it has been too customary among Christians to regard it as the appropriate duty of a particular body of men, the inheritors of a distinct office and commission, and on whose labours no unauthorized person could intrude without usurpation, while the burden was laid on them alone to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature[1]." And, so far as the public ministry of the Gospel extends,

[1] St. Mark xvi. 15.

this distinction is undoubtedly founded in reason and Scripture. To preach, in ordinary cases, the private Christian can pretend no more authority than for administering the Sacraments; and both the one and the other are the appropriate functions of those men only and their successors, on whom this burden was laid and to whom this authority was given when the Lord, after His resurrection, led forth His Apostles as far as Bethany, and when, breathing on them, He said unto them, "receive ye the Holy Ghost;" "as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you[1]."

But that would be a very confined and inadequate notion indeed of the duty to which I refer, which should apprehend it to be exclusively and sufficiently fulfilled by the mere work (however diligently performed) of oral preaching and administration of Baptism and the Eucharist, or which should keep out of sight the innumerable and most efficacious instruments of prayer, of example, of authority, of private remonstrance, of public education, of succours afforded to the temporal wants of the preachers, and their poorer disciples, and of the many other ways of helping in the Lord's great battle, which are strictly within the province of those who themselves may not preach the Gospel, and without which the labours of the most indefatigable preacher would avail but little to the extension and furtherance of God's kingdom. And when

[1] St. John xx. 22. 21.

we consider how distant are those lands which yet remain to be brought from the wildness of pagan errour to the pale of the Christian; how vast is that multitude which, even while nominally within that pale, is still in the shadow of death, and in need of being enlightened and evangelized; when we consider how narrow, in comparison with the numbers which seek admission, are the buildings appropriated to our labours, and how seldom it is in the course of the year that, amid the cares and concerns of the world, those labours can procure an audience; we are compelled, by every motive of duty to ourselves as well as of charity to our brethren, to charge those who have already attained to that good light to give diligence lest others be deprived of the means of access to it, and to invite them, by a wise and bountiful exertion of the talents allotted them, to help us in bringing home to the tents of the Indian and the cottages of the poor, that knowledge of Christ which is the great power of God unto salvation; and to hold up, like Aaron and Hur, the overwearied hands of Moses, lest through their neglect the people of the Lord be discomfited before their spiritual enemies.

This, then, is the task to which we call you; this the task in which we pray you to be fellow-labourers with ourselves; a task no less plainly enjoined in Scripture, than it is obviously deducible from the dictates of our strongest natural wants and wer most amiable natural feelings. If we are forbidden to see our neighbour suffer hunger, disease, or

nakedness, without, to the best of our power, endeavouring to relieve his sufferings; if it be a crime to suffer our enemy's beast of burthen to fall beneath its load without rendering it our assistance; of what punishment must he be worthy who looks on with dry eyes and without an effort to abate the evil, on millions stretched out in deadly darkness of idolatry and superstition; on millions more surrounded with light, yet, by some strange fatality, continuing to work the works of darkness; on millions as yet incapable of good or evil, whose happiness or misery, both in this world and the world to come, must depend on the sort of education which is given them; and on millions who, having begun well, are falling back into the snares of Satan, from which a timely and well-directed warning might yet have the power of extricating them?

Of the various benevolent institutions by which, in different ways and by different applications of the same Christian and benevolent spirit, this mass of moral evil has been already assailed and diminished, whether by the maintenance of missionaries in foreign lands, or the organization of schools at home, or by an increased circulation of that blessed volume which is the fountain and the end of whatever we have preached or whatever ye have believed, it is unnecessary for me to speak in terms of praise, and it would be unchristian and unholy, even while pleading for a different society, to say any thing in the spirit of rivalry. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge envies none of

these, but from her earliest institution it has been her endeavour to attain the objects of all; and while she was the first institution which called the attention of Christian Europe to the spiritual state of India, on whose soil she only, for more than a century, with scanty means but with love unabated, continued and continues to labour; she has supplied with a liberal hand the schools of Great Britain and Ireland with the necessary elementary books of instruction; and has circulated during the last year, either gratuitously or at very reduced prices, above ninety thousand copies of the Bible or the New Testament. These, however, are not the only nor the distinguishing circumstances in her constitution to which I am desirous of calling your notice. Blessed as these are, and necessary means of blessedness, yet can neither the employment of missionaries abroad, nor the education of youth, nor the dissemination of the Scriptures at home, be, any of them or altogether, considered as sufficient to meet the growing necessities and growing dangers of the Messiah's Church and kingdom. It is not enough to bear His banner through distant seas, and declare in the ends of the earth the glory of our God, when our own streets are clogged with vice, and our ears assailed at home with the accents of infidelity and blasphemy. It is not enough to give our children betimes the necessary, but easily abused power of reading and writing, unless we, at the same time, render their tender minds familiar with those

works whence they are afterwards to derive instruction and salvation. It is not even enough to train up a child to find delight in profitable reading, unless, for the appetite thus created, we supply him in after life with wholesome and sufficient aliment. Nor is it enough, lastly, that the Bible alone should be offered to his perusal and meditation, unless, in an age fruitful of errour and false interpretation, some farther helps are supplied to enable him to understand and profit by those Sacred Oracles.

It is, then, as a tract society, as furnishing at easy rates and in sufficient variety the most popular works of our best English divines, and, more recently, and for the purpose of founding parochial libraries, many other popular works well calculated not only for the rational instruction, but the rational amusement of the lower and middling classes; it is as labouring diligently and successfully to counteract the dark machinations of infidelity and disaffection, and as rendering mankind safe from such arts by furnishing them with the means of appreciating their weakness, that the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge stands without a rival. It is thus that she completes her own system of instruction and utility, that she promotes the success of her mission by reforming her fellow Christians at home, that she makes her schools effectual to the end of Christian education by furnishing books in which Christian principles are taught, and that she forwards and secures the

triumphs of her Bibles, by answering the objections of infidelity, by illustrating the abstruser doctrines of the Sacred Volume, and by enforcing and persuading, in ten thousand different forms, the profession and practice of those principles and duties on which there is, fortunately, but little controversy among believers.

And thus, too, it is that, while she herself needs help from no other religious institution, she supplies the deficiencies and promotes the success of all. It is thus that every mission, conducted on the principles of genuine Christianity, every school where Christianity is not excluded as a part of education, and every society which has for its object the dissemination of God's word, derives efficacy from her labours, and has reason to wish her "good luck in the name of the Lord," as an institution which renders perfect what they have begun, and extends to a greater degree of knowledge, and applies to a fuller detail of practice, and informs to a more excellent faith, and subdues to a more systematic obedience, and ripens, lastly, to a greater intensity of holiness here, and everlasting happiness hereafter, those outlines of blessedness to which only they have attained.

Nor, in the description which I have given of the manner in which the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge contributes to forward and complete the benevolent views of all other religious institutions, can I consent to confine her claims to

patronage and favour exclusively to the members of our national establishment. Her practice has in no respect been narrow or sectarian. Devoted as her members conscientiously are to the doctrine and discipline of the English Church, and to the apostolical succession of bishops, priests, and deacons, she has not hesitated to avail herself of the labours of Lutheran missionaries, and in her list of publications the names may be found, not only of foreign presbyterian divines, but of some among the most eminent English dissenters. And if any stranger to our Church conceives of us as exclusively and intolerantly labouring, not for the extension and triumph of Gospel truth, but for the advantage of a particular hierarchy, let me implore him, without prejudice, to examine some of those volumes which excite his jealousy. Let him try our doctrines by the test of Scripture; let him weigh our prayers in the balance of meditation and charity, and, if he does not join our communion, I am convinced he will think more favourably of our principles and practice, and discover that we too are engaged with less clamour, perhaps, and with more discretion, but with equal earnestness, and a no less glowing love, in the same great cause, which, I willingly bear him witness, the conscientious dissenter is endeavouring to forward.

But to the sincere members of the Church of England, to those whom I now behold around me, and who regard her, with reason, as one of the

purest systems of Christian government now on earth, and one of the most efficient agents of Christian instruction which the world has yet witnessed, who rejoice in her permanence, and are sensibly affected by her dangers; to them need I say any thing in recommendation of a society which has, for more than a century, been universally recognized as her firmest bulwark, and on the continuance and activity of which, it must, humanly speaking, depend whether she is to sink, first, into comparative uselessness, and afterwards, into utter and unpitied ruin; or whether she is still to flourish in the candlestick where her God hath placed her, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of our spiritual Israel?

Ye that love these ancient and venerable forms of devotion which instruct and improve, while they awe and affect us, give your aid that the poor man also may read and possess his Common Prayer. Ye that honour the Sacraments of Christ, help us to make known their meaning and necessity to those who now shrink back from the Altar in ignorant alarm. Ye that fear the sin of schism, or are appalled by the muttered thunders of infidelity, be sure that there is balm in Gilead if the valuable specifics which our society offers are brought within the reach of the deluded victim of doubt or impiety; and, above all, let it be seen by the course of your own lives, that you are really attached to the religion which you profess, the forms of devotion which

you recommend to others, and that the system of faith and practice which you prescribe to your poorer neighbour, is that which is your own guide on earth, and your comfort in the hour of dissolution.

SERMON X.

THE CONVERSION OF THE HEATHEN.

[Preached for the Church Missionary Society, at Whittington, Salop, April 16, 1820.]

ST. MATTHEW vi. 10

Thy kingdom come.

IN the Divine prayer from which these words are taken, there is a twofold recurrence of the term God's kingdom. In the former instance we desire of our Father that His kingdom may come, and in the latter we acknowledge and recognise the kingdom of the Almighty as, together with His glory and His power, existing for ever and ever: a circumstance which should seem to point out to us two distinct and different manifestations of celestial authority, the one which is now and has been from the beginning of time, the other which is yet future, and is advancing to take place among men.

That the name of kingdom is familiarly and appropriately applied to the relationship which God bears to all created things as their Maker, Preserver and Governor, is plain not only from the natural reason of mankind, but from innumerable passages of Scripture. Even the heathen had so far a per-

ception of this propriety, that they called their Jupiter the king of gods and men; and to the Lord Jehovah the prophet David, in his address to his son Solomon, ascribes the same distinctive title in a splendid strain of pathetic eloquence: "Thine, O Lord," are his words, "is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine. Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all[1]!" The establishment of this kingdom, however, being the subject of our praises, not of our prayers, has no place among the petitions which our Lord has taught us to offer up, but is reserved with more propriety to the glorification or doxology by which those petitions are concluded.

But out of this universal empire over nature there was to arise, in process of time, an especial kingdom over the moral world, to which all the prophets of elder times bore witness, and which is described by the evangelists, as it was already familiarly spoken of by the Jews, as the kingdom of Heaven or of God. The good old Simeon waited for this consolation of his people when it was foretold to him that he should not depart before he had seen the Christ, or anointed Prince of Israel. It was the argument by which the Baptist moved his hearers to repentance that the kingdom of Heaven was fast approaching, and our blessed Lord

[1] 1 Chron. xxix. 11.

Himself, on His first appearance in Galilee, came preaching, as we are told, the good tidings of His Father's kingdom.

We cannot, therefore, be at a loss to determine that by this kingdom is meant the world under the Gospel dispensation. The person who rules over it is our Saviour, the Son and the Anointed of the Most High. Its laws and statutes are the Gospel which He has given, and its subjects are those who believe in and are called by His name. The beginning of this empire is to be dated from the time at which Jesus ascended into Heaven, and sate on the right hand of God, all power and rule over the Church being then committed to Him. The exercise of that power shall remain in the hands of the Messiah till all His enemies shall be put under His feet, and death itself shall be destroyed by Him. "Then cometh the end[1]," when the Son shall deliver up again His mediatorial kingdom to Him from whom He received it, when, having put all things under His feet, He shall Himself be subject unto the Father; and God, in His threefold Unity, shall be thenceforward all in all.

The plain and natural meaning, then, of entreating our Heavenly Father that His kingdom may come, is that, by His grace, the religion of His Son may be extended, supported, and established. It is the endeavouring to aid by our prayers that great and good work in which the Apostles laboured, and

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 24.

in which the best and wisest of mankind have, in imitation of the Apostles, esteemed it a glory and happiness to endure hardship, contempt, and martyrdom; that work which was the subject of the latest charge given by the Lord Jesus to His followers, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you[1]."

It is true that, in its fullest sense, the prayer which we offer thus to God embraces far more than the outward establishment and profession of His faith among the sons of men. It comprises a devout aspiration for the establishment, or renewal, or preservation of Christ's kingdom in our hearts, as an internal, a ruling, and overmastering principle of faith, of feeling, and deportment. It comprises a desire to be admitted, in God's good time, to the society of that blessed portion of His Church which, having been faithful unto death, is already rejoicing in Paradise. It implies, above all, a longing after that triumphant return of our glorified Saviour, when, having completed the number of His elect, He shall hasten His more perfect kingdom, when God shall visibly take unto Himself His great power and shall reign, and when we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of His holy name, may have our perfect consummation

[1] St. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

and bliss, both in body and soul, in His eternal and everlasting glory!

But in its plainest and most immediate sense, in that sense in which it must be first fulfilled in ourselves before we can hope for a share in these further and greater blessings, in that sense in which it must be first made known to all nations before, and in order to its full and final accomplishment; in this sense, I say, it can only be understood as a desire that the knowledge of Divine truth should be extended and confirmed among men, that the Gentiles should come to His light and their kings to the brightness of His rising, that the everlasting Gospel should be preached to every nation until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and His Christ, and "the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea[1]!"

This, then, is the import of the second petition in that prayer which we derive from the example and authority of our Saviour, and which, with the great majority of Christians in every sect and country, is a constituent and necessary part of their daily and nightly devotions. And, since to petition Heaven for any grace which we are not really desirous of obtaining is, manifestly, either a mockery of God in using a form of words without meaning, or an hypocritical attempt to deceive Him by counterfeiting desires which we do not feel; and since

[1] Hab. ii. 14.

God, we may be sure, would never have enjoined the expression of wants and desires which it was not fitting and necessary that we should continually feel and act upon, it follows, from the mere fact that our Lord has taught us thus to pray, that the instruction of the ignorant and the conversion of the heathen should be the earnest and daily wish of all those by whom His name is named.

Let me ask you, then, my brethren, and ask you as in His presence to whom all hearts are open and all desires known, who knoweth our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking, have you seriously laid to heart the great blessedness of knowing and believing His Gospel, of being admitted to the name and privileges of His children, of having your nature washed in His baptism from the infection of death and of sin, and your souls maintained and nourished by His most precious body and blood? Are you duly sensible of the advantage which you possess over the heathen in knowing God as He is; in being instructed as to the service which He requires of you; in being encouraged under the miseries of mortality by a sure and certain hope of everlasting happiness after death; in being comforted under the burthen of your natural weakness and surrounding temptations by the sacrifice for sin through Christ's blood, the assurance of glory through His merits, and the help to be obtained through His name from the Holy Ghost to enlighten, guide, and comfort you?

Suppose that these things, which we have known

from our childhood, and have, therefore, ceased to regard as they ought to be regarded, were at this time first made known to us; suppose we were now first told that there is a good, and just, and holy, and merciful God over all, to whom all His works are known, who requires from us no bloody sacrifice, no shocking, or difficult, or costly service, but whose eyes and ears are ever open to the prayer of the humble and the penitent! Suppose we now first heard that the sins by which we are each of us conscious that we have offended God are pardoned, on our true repentance, through the mediation and sufferings of God's beloved Son, who so loved the inhabitants of the world that He came down from Heaven to take on Himself their punishment! Suppose we had now first opened to us the prospect of another and a better world in which we may hope, together with those dear and virtuous friends of whom death has robbed us, to dwell in the presence of the Lord, the objects of His mercy and His favour! Suppose that when our prospect of this reward grew dim, and our heart fainted through a sense of our inherent weakness and unworthiness, we were now first lifted up to hope and diligence in well doing by the promise of a pure and mighty Comforter to enlighten us when we were dark, to support us when we were feeble, to raise us when we fell, and finally to beat down under our feet our fiercest and mightiest enemy! Suppose, I say, these things were told you this day for the first time, and ask your own hearts whether

the natural sympathies of humanity would not produce an earnest desire that the same glorious truths might be made known to others besides yourselves, and that all your neighbours, yea, that all mankind should, like you, be enabled to behold this great salvation?

My brethren, there are many millions of men in the world, hundreds of millions, to whom these blessed truths are yet unknown. Millions who have lost the knowledge of the one true God amid a multitude of false or evil deities; who bow down to stocks and stones; who propitiate their senseless idols with cruel and bloody sacrifices; who lose sight of their dying friends with no expectation of again beholding them, and who go down to the grave themselves in doubt and trembling ignorance, without light, without hope, without knowledge of a Saviour!

Is it your pleasure, is it your desire, that these your fellow creatures should be brought from darkness into light, that they should share with you your helps, your hopes, your knowledge, your salvation? Can you pray with sincerity that the kingdom of God may come to them as it has come to you; and will you, thus desiring and thus praying, refuse to furnish, according to your ability, the means of bringing it to them? You cannot, you will not, you dare not!

"But still," it has been said, "if these men are ignorant they are at least safe. If much has not been given to them, much will not be required from

them; and if the honest and virtuous heathen lives up to his imperfect knowledge, he may be admitted by that God whose mercy is over all His works, to that Heaven of which he has not received the promise." It may be so, and in many instances I trust that it will be so. I trust in God that the merits of Christ may be the fountain of life to many who, in this world, have had no opportunity of tasting His living waters. But even this hope will afford little comfort to those who look impartially on the general conduct of heathen nations, since, though a blind and imperfect endeavour after holiness may be accepted, the sins even of the most ignorant, so long as those sins are committed in opposition to the law of nature, and the light of natural reason and conscience, must be exceedingly hateful to God, and call down from Him their due measure of punishment. It is not necessary to suppose that he who was imperfectly informed of his Master's will, and committed things worthy of stripes, will be chastised so severely as those sinners who enjoyed and abused the full light of the Gospel; but chastised he must be if the word of God is true, and the mildest of God's chastisements are described to us in colours dreadful enough to make the flesh creep and the ears tingle.

The heathen, by far the greater part of them, are any thing but innocent and conscientious followers of the law of nature. Child-murder, unkindness to parents, dishonesty, lying, and bloody cruelty abound among them to a degree, of which

the wickedness of Christians, great as it is, can furnish no adequate idea. And if by some rare advantage of temper and situation, a comparatively innocent and holy man may here and there be met with, like "a firebrand plucked out of the burning[1]," this is but a fresh encouragement to make known the ways of peace to the multitudes who are perishing, and to give to those few, who make so good use of their imperfect lights, the far greater help and comfort of the Gospel. Be sure, my friends, it is not a needless task which He, who knew all things, undertook when He came to give light to those that sate in darkness. It was no superfluous revelation to confirm which so many miracles were wrought, so many prophecies delivered, so pure and precious blood poured forth on the rocks of Calvary. It was no needless labour which Christ imposed on His apostles, to go and preach His gospel unto every creature, nor is that an idle or unmeaning prayer which we are taught to utter in the words "Thy kingdom come!" It remains to be seen whether our lips and our hearts go together.

If, indeed, the spiritual danger of the heathen were less great, if their spiritual advantages were greater than we have any reason to suppose them, yet, from a regard to their temporal wants, it would be our duty to desire and contend for the extension of Christianity. Wherever she goes, civilization

[1] Amos iv. 11.

follows in her train; wherever she goes, the duties and the rights of mankind are practised and recognised; the fetters of the slave are lightened and removed; the female sex are restored to their natural situation and their kindly influence in society; and the profession of godliness is shown to be great riches, as contributing to the wisdom, the wealth, and the happiness of the nation which receives it. Let us compare our present condition with that of our forefathers while the Gospel was yet unknown to them! Let us recollect that the poorest man who now hears me is more warmly clad, more comfortably lodged, enjoys a mind better stored with ideas, and greater security of liberty, life, and property, than a king among the wild Americans or the ancient Britons; and we shall feel and understand the blessings of a religion, which has been the principal agent in a change so beneficial, a religion by which the ignorance of man is enlightened, and his manners rendered gentle, which, by protecting the fruits of industry, has encouraged every useful invention, and which, even amid the increasing luxury of the rich, has lessened the distance between them and the poor, by calling the attention of both to that aweful moment when all shall be equal in each other's eyes, as they are now in the eyes of their Maker!

But, if it is the duty of all Christians every where to co-operate in the furtherance of these glorious prospects, so there is no nation in the world on whom so strong an obligation of this kind is laid as on

the inhabitants of Great Britain. Our colonies, our commerce, our conquests, our discoveries, the empire which the Almighty has subjected to our sword, the purity of our national creed, the apostolic dignity of our national establishments, what are all these but so many calls to labour in the improvement of the heritage which we have received, so many talents entrusted to our charge, of which a strict account must be one day rendered? Shall we overlook our heavy debt of blood and tears to injured Africa? Shall we forget those innumerable isles of the southern ocean first visited by our sails, but which so long derived from us nothing but fresh wants, fresh diseases, fresh wickedness? Shall we forget the spiritual destitution of those sixty millions of our fellow men, yea, our fellow subjects, who in India still bow the head to vanities, and torment themselves, and burn their mothers, and butcher their infants, at the shrine of a mad and devilish superstition? Shall we forget, while every sea is traversed by our keels, and every wind brings home wealth into our harbours, that we have a treasure at home of which those from whom we draw our wealth are in the utmost need; a treasure, if used aright, more precious than rubies, but which, if wilfully and wantonly hid, must, like the Spartan fox, destroy and devour its possessor? Oh, when you are about to lie down this night, and begin, in the words which the Lord has taught you, to commend your bodies and souls to His protection, will you not blush, will you not trem-

ble to think, while you say to God "Thy kingdom come!" that you have this day refused your contributions towards the extension of that kingdom? I know you will not refuse them! Or, is it still necessary to recommend to your support that peculiar instrument of doing good in whose behalf I now stand before you, and to vindicate the Church Missionary Society from the suspicion of party and sectarian motives? This, also, I will attempt, though in the great cause of the propagation of the Gospel it is wearisome to descend to disputes as to the fittest channel of a benevolence which can hardly be directed into a wrong one. There are other bodies in our Church associated for the same good end; to them, if you prefer them, carry your alms, or let them share with us in your bounty. But see, I charge you before God, see that through some channel or other that bounty finds its way, lest you be found hereafter to have hindered *us* without helping *them*, and to have made your orthodox zeal a cloak for your backwardness in the cause of the Gospel! But for our own sake, for yours, for the sake of common sense and Christian charity, let me protest against that monstrous doctrine that, because there are other and elder societies in the Church for the propagation of the Gospel, it is, therefore, a mark of disaffection to the Church to establish and support a new one for the same excellent purpose. From what page of Scripture, what period of ecclesiastical history, what council, what father of the Church do the

supporters of such a doctrine derive their arguments or authority? When have such restrictions as they would forge been imposed even in those Churches which carry to the highest pitch their admiration of antiquity and precedent? Was Benedict accused or suspected of schism when he instituted a new monastic order instead of uniting himself to the elder fraternities under the rules of Antony or Pacomius? Was Francis of Assisi, was Dominic, was Ignatius Loyola, all of them the founders of new establishments, were these men told by the zealots of Rome that it became them to rest contented with those means of piety or exertion which had been bequeathed by the wisdom of our ancestors? Or why should I instance the wisdom and liberality of the children of worldly prudence in opposition to the errours of those whom I acknowledge and reverence as belonging to the children of light? Did, in our own Church, and in the days of our immediate fathers, the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts presume to tell her younger sister for Promoting Christian Knowledge that, in sending missionaries to India, she was thrusting an intrusive sickle into the harvest of another? There are very many motives besides a sectarian spirit which may lead men to institute and encourage new institutions rather than to throw the whole weight of their bounty into the old. While some prefer the wary caution of a self-elected corporation, others may, with at least a show of reason, and certainly with-

out just offence to any, conceive that more good is likely to be produced by the popular and expansive force of a society where every member has a voice in the application of his contributions. With many, a personal knowledge of the directors of one association will induce them to prefer it to another equally respectable, and there are many who, from experience of the superior activity possessed by most recent institutions, will expect greater and more beneficial exertions from a new society for no other reason than because it is new. But, while there is room and employment for all, while there is a unity of faith, a unity of object, a unity of symbols and Sacraments, a unity of religious and canonical obedience, and, above all, a unity of Christian charity, such institutions may all wish each other good luck in the name of the Lord, with no other rivalry than that of which shall best serve their common Master.

There is another, however, and a more plausible objection made to us, that our Society is only ostensibly anxious for the conversion of the heathen, or the general interests of Christianity, while its main attention is directed, and its inevitable consequences tend to the support of a party among ourselves, whose rise and prevalence have been for some years the objects of peculiar jealousy to the majority of the Church of England. Now it might be, perhaps, sufficient in answer, to enquire by what means, supposing its members to have such intentions, those intentions could be forwarded by

a society for foreign missions. Is it by a fraudulent appropriation to other purposes of the funds which we raise for this specific object? Our annual accounts are before the world; nor has, indeed, a villainy of this nature been, at any time, imputed to us. Is it by a selection of enthusiastic or fanatical missionaries, or missionaries remarkable for their adherence to obnoxious opinions? Even here it would be hard to say how the purposes of party at home would be forwarded by sending our most active partisans abroad; nor would the advantage to the Church be less evident of a conduct which removed from her bosom those persons whose presence is supposed to disturb her peace, to scenes where their peculiarities could do little harm, while the warmth of their zeal might carry them through obstacles under which a calmer spirit would sink.

I will not, however, dissemble my sentiments, nor can any advantage arise from a pretended ignorance of the nature of those accusations which are brought against us. If it had been the object, if it had been the practice of this Society, to disseminate among the Heathen, or elsewhere, those peculiar views of Christianity which are known by the name of Calvin, believing, as I do, though with sincere respect and esteem for the virtue and talents by which those doctrines have been adorned and supported, but believing, as I do, those doctrines to be most injurious to the Divine Majesty, and most pernicious in their ordinary and natural

effects on the human mind, I, for one, would have sought some other means of contributing to the propagation of the Gospel.

But, I speak from personal knowledge when I say that, in no one case has any preference been given in the choice of missionaries to the followers of Calvin over those of Arminius; and that while enthusiasm of all kinds has been discouraged by the managers of our institution, with a jealousy little less than that which has been exerted against positive immorality, they have been contented to exhort their agents to a more zealous attention to those points in which all Churchmen are agreed, and to moderation as to those on which they themselves were divided.

It is by our fruits, however, that we desire to be judged, and if the exclusive employment of missionaries, either episcopally ordained at home, or furnished by those Lutheran Churches of Germany whence the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge has derived some of its most distinguished labourers; if the translation of the English liturgy into three new languages, and its introduction into weekly use among the negroes of Africa, and the ancient Syrian churches in India; if the consignment of a very considerable sum of money to the entire disposal of the excellent and apostolical Bishop of Calcutta[1], and a desire, repeatedly expressed and consistently acted on, to submit our mis-

[1] The Right Rev. T. F. Middleton, D.D., first Bishop of Calcutta.

sionaries in the east to his spiritual guidance and prudent counsels; if these are marks of allegiance to the Church, we may at least disclaim the charge of having departed from her, and we may hope that our attention to her sound form of words and doctrine may be blessed by the Almighty as a means of grace to millions who now sit in darkness.

On these grounds it is that, as Englishmen, as Churchmen, as Christians, as lovers of the virtues and happiness of mankind, I now appeal to your bounty. And that our alms may go up before the sight of God, and be blessed both to the givers, the objects, and the dispensers, let me entreat your prayers through the merits of Him in whose name only is strength or righteousness.

SERMON XI.

THE DISPERSION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

[Preached for the British and Foreign Bible Society, at Shrewsbury, 5th Sept. 1813.]

REV. xiv. 6.

I saw another angel fly in the midst of Heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell in the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.

BEING called upon, with the permission of your ordinary pastors, to plead in this place the cause of the British and Foreign Bible Society, I conceive it to be incumbent on a minister of the Church of England addressing an assembly of the same persuasion, to examine with patient impartiality the objections which have been levelled against this institution, as unfavourable or unfriendly to the religious establishments of our country. A more grateful task it would indeed have been to consider the broad and general duties of diffusing religious knowledge, and the glorious facilities which our present combination affords for sowing the seeds of eternal life in soils the most distant and unkindly! For, whether we seek to turn the nominal Christian from the errour of his ways, or whether it be

the blinded heathen whose eyes we strive to open, no means of improvement can be employed more effectual, none, assuredly, less obvious to objection, than the dispersion of the oracles of God. Other preachers may be intemperate or careless; they may shock by hasty zeal, or disgust by unsuitable demeanour, but these holy volumes are every where pure, and consistent, and peaceable. The indolence of the times, the difficulty of access, the drawn sword of persecution may impede, perhaps, the missionaries' progress; but though the feet of those that bear good tidings may linger on the mountains, the word of God runneth very swiftly; and wherever education has gone before, the natural curiosity of mankind will secure to these wonderful testimonies a favourable and attentive reception. If, indeed, the one great object which is pursued by the society in whose behalf I now address you, be regarded; if the effects which it has already produced be estimated, and those which its augmented means of action may enable it hereafter to accomplish, it might be hoped that no scanty blessing, no unhallowed destiny would follow an association like ours. It might be hoped, without the guilt of enthusiastic vanity, that the prophecy of my text were even now to receive its fulfilment, that like that angel whom John beheld bearing on his mighty wings the confession of Christ's religion, our society should advance in the strength of faith conquering and to conquer, till all that now oppose or distrust shall have unlearnt

their fears and repented them of their unjust imputations, till hostile sects and hostile nations shall have united heart and hand in the dispersion of their common Gospel, till the acts of civilization and the graces of Christianity shall have sprung up beneath our fostering care in the forests of the savage, and the hills of the robber, and till the universal earth shall be filled with "the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea[1]!"

With such an object in our view, it is hard indeed, and discouraging, that our labours should be regarded with distrust and coldness by many of those whose approbation we would most desire; that, like the founder of the Roman walls, our own brethren insult our progress, and that we are compelled to encounter the charge of hostility or indifference to those rituals, which, next to God's own oracles, are the objects of our greatest reverence; unless, yielding to this clamour, we desert the principles of our union, and reject, as Nehemiah rejected the Samaritans, the proffered and powerful aid of our Christian and Protestant brethren. True it is, that, if we consider the former history of our English Church, or those general principles of human nature which, under similar circumstances, conduct to results unavoidably similar, we shall find but little reason for surprise in the objections which, from certain quarters, are so strongly urged against our institution. The Church of England

[1] Isaiah xi. 9.

was, we know, baptized in blood, and while the scars of her early sufferings still remain to warn her children against inconsiderate innovation, she may well be pardoned, if to others the spirit of her establishment should sometimes appear too jealous and exclusive.

Those who are in possession of what many covet, are apt, from that very circumstance, to become distrustful; those who have an extensive fortress to defend, are wisely and piously vigilant, lest by their remissness even the slightest outwork be betrayed. Far from imputing unworthy motives to such as have thus warmly opposed us, I view with respect even errours which are founded on a zeal for God's house; I venerate their feelings, I lament their apprehensions; and if I myself have acted differently, it is because I am convinced that those apprehensions are the phantoms only of prejudice or misinformation; it is from an experience that such grisly shadows need but be approached to lose their terrours; to drop, like the monsters of a twilight journey, their formidable crests and giant arms, and sink before the light of reason into that harmless insignificance from which the magic of fear has raised them.

Of the two peculiarities which, while we regard them as the main pillars of our institution, have been the innocent cause of so much serious offence and alarm, it may be said, without fear of contradiction, that while the dangers ascribed to them are at most obscure and contingent, the regu-

lations themselves are of obvious and immediate utility.

By the admixture of sects in our governing committee, we obtain a greater and more concentrated power of inculcating religious knowledge than can be possessed by any separate exertions of those religious parties which compose our union, and we remove all possibility of difference as to the sort of knowledge to be diffused, by confining our exertions, as a body, to the dispensing that one work whose authority we all profess to venerate, and to which, as to the very throne and oracle of truth, we severally make our appeal.

The first of these assertions it may seem almost a waste of time to prove. Its principle is acknowledged in every alliance of human beings for the purposes of peace or war; nature and experience cry aloud with ten thousand voices that united strength is stronger by that union, that efforts uncombined are weak both singly and in the aggregate, and that in anarchies of every kind, *dum singuli pugnant universi vincuntur*. It may be said, indeed, that the same advantages which the social possesses over the solitary state, are possessed by one large over many smaller combinations. The result of union is more than a simple addition of those items which each could separately furnish; not only each individual does more, and does it with greater ease when aided by the stimulus of example and fellowship, but works may be under-

taken, which, except by the force of numbers, it would be physically impossible to effect.

Nor is this all; great bodies have the power and the tendency to multiply themselves faster than small. They attract more of the world's attention; they offer themselves to the eyes of men in a magnitude which cannot be overlooked, and attract allies and proselytes with a force continually increasing, and a zeal whose contagious example is the stronger by being concentrated. The exertions and successes of the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, of the propaganda college, and those other gigantic institutions which owe their birth to the refined policy of the papal government, are all so many illustrations of this principle. In later times, and with a purer faith, the Moravian brethren afford us a similar example, and many of those who, while they approve of our grand object, are offended by our spirit of union, are themselves by no means blind to the mischief and danger of a house divided against itself, and lament as loudly as any men those unhappy differences among the people of God, whereby our Saviour's seamless coat is rent, and the progress of His faith impeded. It is urged, however, on the other hand, that the Bible Society has itself a tendency to increase and perpetuate those divisions of which our land is sick unto death. It is said that we (for I am speaking as a Churchman, and it is an assembly of Churchmen whom I address,) admit the dissenters to an

equality with ourselves; that we throw our weight into their scale, and that by enabling them to distribute Bibles, we give them additional influence over the minds of the poor. It is further prophesied that a latitudinarian feeling, an indifference on our parts to all the peculiarities of our establishment, will be the consequence of this our pious intercourse; while by some unexplained and unexplainable difference in our own temperament and that of our allies, their prejudices are to be all confirmed by the same process which eradicates our ancient attachments.

The first of these objections I would answer shortly, that as we have never claimed precedence, so we abandon none. I know not any superiority except that of truth which one religious sect has a right, as such, to demand over another; and I am confident that truth, wherever that is found, cannot be more effectually forwarded than by the friendly intercourse in good works of those who conscientiously differ. It will not, it cannot be esteemed a weakening of our faith to learn the characters of our opponents; nor injurious to those feelings without which faith is vain, if we separate a becoming horrour of their heresy from an uncharitable scorn of their persons.

But is it meant that when we admit their teachers to vote with us, even in those spiritual concerns respecting which we are all agreed, we proclaim to the world, by so doing, that we apprehend no difference between their opinions and those which we

have professed so solemnly?—none between their commission to preach the Gospel and that which is, in our own case, derived from the apostles?—none between the Gospel taught by them and that which we have ourselves received? I answer, rather, by proving to these our brethren and to the world that, where our conscience will allow us, we are ready to co-operate with them in every good work; we stamp our disapprobation of their peculiar tenets with ten-fold force and value; we divest our orthodoxy of all reasonable suspicion of worldly pride or interest, and evince that when, in proper time and place, we declare what we conceive to be the errours of these our friends, we declare the genuine, and painful, and brotherly feelings of our heart and conscience.

By those, in the second place, who object the increasing influence of dissenters among the poor by the Bibles which they are thus enabled to distribute, it should be remembered that, if there be any force at all in their reasoning, it will apparently prove too much. Influence is unquestionably obtained by the donor of food, or clothing, or medicine, as well as by the gratuitous distributer of the Sacred Volume, and we must, therefore, refuse our co-operation not only to this society but to all others, whether they be patriotic or charitable institutions, from which dissenters are not excluded. But further, if the numbers of Churchmen predominate in the Bible Society (and if they do not predominate to whose fault is that attributable?

certainly not to theirs who are reviled and slandered for supporting it), if our numbers predominate, it is plain that more comparative influence will be obtained by our party than by theirs; so that to remove this objection at least the means are in our own possession. Or granting, what is not now the case, and by God's help never shall be, that the number of dissenters were greater than that of Churchmen in the Bible Society, yet, even thus, it is plain that the more Bibles the former bestow, the fewer of their peculiar tracts they will have the means of bestowing, and that a part of their strength, so far as that strength is hostile to our cause, will thus be manifestly neutralized. But, in truth, I do not envy the applause or patronage of that Churchman who can murmur at a good work because it is done by a Samaritan; or forbid his brother to cast out devils in the name of the Lord "because he followeth not with us[1]." The Gospel, by whatever hands distributed, is the Gospel notwithstanding; nor is such distribution to be regarded with ill will by the successors of that great apostle to whom we trace our British hierarchy, who rejoiced in his bonds that Christ was preached, though He were preached "even of envy and strife[2]."

To the third objection, as I am at a loss to discover on what principle it is founded, I am certainly not a little perplexed to reply. Does it pro-

[1] St. Luke ix. 49. [2] Phil. i. 15.

ceed on the results of former experience? Is it from analogy that our opponents reason? or from that, which their alarm should tacitly appear to confess, the activity of the separatists and the supineness of our established clergy? But of an association on the principles of the Bible Society no precise example (unfortunately for the Christian world), no precise example can be found; and in those smaller republics of Switzerland or Germany, whose chequered sects have been brought into a state of contact not altogether dissimilar, it will be mostly seen that the Romanists, as the major number, have triumphed over the others; that the less has not attracted the greater body, but the greater, as might be expected, has absorbed the less. Where, indeed, indifference to the distinctive features of two or more religious parties prevails, the very imitative nature of mankind will give the preference to the religion of the majority; and where so many circumstances unite in favour of an establishment like ours, it is, surely, not too much to expect that the establishment will be a gainer.

To the activity, however, of the dissenters in disseminating their peculiar tenets, our common experience bears testimony. It is an activity which might reasonably be expected in the smaller body of the assailants, who have by so much a stronger stimulus than the defenders of an establishment, as the hope of obtaining is keener than the sense of possession. But that this active hostility will be increased by tolerance, that their religious animo-

sity will receive strength as their personal suspicions die away, is hardly a consequence to be apprehended. And that the supineness imputed to our own pastors is exaggerated, grossly exaggerated, both by the vaunts of our adversaries and the slanderous fears of our friends, that the activity of separatists has produced a corresponding re-action on our part, and that we are ourselves improved both in diligence and union, in proportion as such qualities are needed, is a truth which the experience of the last twenty years may appear sufficiently to prove. Nor will it, nor can it be said that those Churchmen and prelates who have supported and do support the Bible Society are the least active, the least zealous, the least popular of their order in the discharge of their professional duties, or the most deficient in that conciliatory spirit which, from the time of the apostles to the present hour, has been found the best means of conversion, and which is made all things to all men, that it may "by all means save some[1]."

To those, in fact, who with so loud alarm vociferate that the Church is falling into the hands of schismatics, I would answer with the Theban Pelopidas on a very different occasion, "and why not they into ours?" Why, if any prepossessions are removed by such a union as that of the Bible Society, should not those of the dissenting members be expected to give ground? Is our religion so impure,

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 22.

our worship so superstitious, our preaching so unlearned or so unchristian that we may fear a comparison with any church in the world? Is it not rather to be hoped that those, who, from honest though mistaken motives, have been estranged from our communion, when that distance is overpast which now gives room for misapprehension or calumny, when they behold us in our natural features, and hear us in our natural tones of peace and charity; when they find our prelates and pastors, our laymen and divines engaged in the same good cause as themselves, courting them to union, and ready to unite with them so far as we can unite without partaking of their schism; is it not to be hoped that, instead of perverting us, they may themselves be changed, that they may be led to reflect on the apparent needlessness of their separation, and return to those arms which are with brotherly love extended to receive them?

But, alas my friends, in days like these, of unexampled licentiousness and danger, when not the private interests of particular Churches, but the universal faith of Christianity is assailed; while irreligion and immorality hold the larger and unenlightened portion of the world in chains; while among the half-thinking and the half-learned, infidelity has so widely scattered her venom; while the exploded dreams of ancient atheism are revived by men in high stations; and while the editors of low blasphemy are applauded by the rabble in their place of punishment, these are no times when the

mutual transgressions of brethren are to be remembered, or when the defenders of the faith are to quarrel among themselves as to the nature of their commission, or the fashion of their arms! If we cannot worship together, let us at least do good in company; and if the inferences which we draw from the Word of God, on certain points, unfortunately vary, let us the more anxiously unite to dispense that pure Word itself, which, by the confession of all sides, is able to make men "wise unto salvation[1]."

Here, however, have other and very different objections been started; and as these are levelled at the second fundamental rule of our institution, I must again remind you that the sole object of our union is the circulation of the Scriptures without note or comment. To this two objections have been made; the first, that the design is in itself inexpedient; the second, that it is imperfect and insufficient. Of the two learned authors by whom these positions are advanced, the first maintains that the indiscriminate circulation of all parts of the Bible is neither commanded in Scripture, nor advantageous to the souls of men. The second assures us that to distribute the Scriptures alone is to stop short in that dissemination of sound religious knowledge, which it is incumbent on us all to forward, and that in the particular case of Churchmen, a society which distributes the Sacred Volume

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 15.

only, has a tendency to induce a neglect of the Common Prayer.

I have stated these objections without any wilful exaggeration, and I have stated them calmly and gravely; yet, indeed, it is with some certain difficulty that any man imbued with that common veneration for the Scriptures, which protestants as yet retain, or with that common knowledge of logic which was once a necessary part of education, can refrain from astonishment at the apparent heresy contained in the first assertion, or a something more than astonishment at the lamentable inconsequence of the latter.

That there are some things in the Sacred Volume hard to be understood, and that profane and self-willed readers may wrest them to their own destruction is a truth, indeed, of which the Scripture itself instructs us. But from this acknowledged principle it can by no means follow as an inference that we are at liberty to retrench, or alter, or intercept from the perusal of Christ's little ones, any portion of those books which the Spirit of God has prompted, and which are all alike intended for the religious nourishment of all.

I know not any blessing of the Almighty which may not be abused; but I am sure that the casual abuse of food, or raiment, or instruction, will justify no man in withholding such blessings from any who need his assistance. (I ask not by what authority, short of that infallible pontiff to whom such speculations not obscurely tend, we can decide what

portions of Scripture are unnecessary or unprofitable; but it may be demanded without offence, whether most errours both in doctrine and practice have not arisen from a partial and imperfect acquaintance with the word of God, and whether it be not from the general and ungarbled testimony of the Sacred Volume, from its arrangement as a system, and the mutual light afforded by its several treatises and histories, that our religious faith is to be formed; a faith not founded on some detached and doubtful passages, but on the united testimony of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ "Himself being the chief corner-stone[1].")

To multiply authorities in a case of this sort were to weary out myself and you; for neither has Hooker taught in vain that "the reading of Scripture is effectual, as well to lay the first foundation, as to add degrees of further perfection in the fear of God;" nor was Chillingworth deceived when he urged that, in necessary points, all Scripture is intelligible; nor has our Church unprofitably ordained that the whole Sacred Volume be read through in order in the course of every year[2].

[1] Ephes. ii. 20.

[2] Ce livre sacré—est, à la verité, intelligible à tout le monde par rapport à ce qu'il faut croire et faire pour obtenir de la misericorde de Dieu le salut éternel qui y est annoncé et promis sous la condition de la foi et de la sainteté. Ainsi le peuple fidele à qui ses occupations en son genre de vie ne permettent pas toujours de se munir des secours dont on vient de parler, a pourtant cette consolation d'y trouver les verités salutaires sous beaucoup d'etude et de meditation; comme, d'autre coté, il est inexcusable

To the learned author of the second objection, no doctrine can be imputed so irreverent to Scripture, or so repugnant to the practice of our Church. His assertion, as he has himself explained it, and when stripped of that cloud which the dust of controversy can spread around the most harmless tenet, is merely that the zealous partizan of certain doctrines will not be contented with the distribution of the Bible alone, but will subjoin such tracts or commentaries as explain the Bible according to his own opinions. This is a doctrine which I am not disposed to controvert, any more than I shall deny the second proposition of his syllogism, that the Bible Society do not, in their corporate capacity, distribute any such tracts or commentaries. If then his conclusion had been that the whole duty of a member of our Church is not comprised in uniting himself to the Bible Society, I should acknowledge his argument to be legitimate, though I should wonder, perhaps, at the labour bestowed on a proposition so self-evident. But is it really possible to infer from premises like these, that the Bible Society induces in Churchmen a disregard to the liturgy and doctrinal tracts of the Church? If an oath were imposed on our members that we should belong to no other institution; that in our private bounty we should circulate no religious books except the Bible without note or comment, his reasoning would indeed possess both consistence and plausibility.

s'il ne les y cherche pas sous pretexte de son ignorance.—Beausobre, Pref. Gen. sur le N. T. p. 11.

While, however, we remain at full liberty to take what steps we please for disseminating the liturgy from other funds, and in other associations, while many, nay most of us do, in fact, belong to associations for that definite purpose, his argument is almost as accurate as if he had insisted that they who distribute food to the poor, will therefore neglect to give them medicine; or that he whom we behold to-day officiating at the altar or the reading-desk, renounces by that overt act all future intention of serving God as a preacher.

By advice, nevertheless, from whatever motive it proceed, we may well and wisely profit; and if the insinuations which I have noticed, effect, even in a single district, an increased distribution of the Common Prayer; if our members, such of them as profess our established religion, are by these means awakened to a livelier zeal for its distinguishing and peculiar doctrines; if performing the one part of their duty they leave not "the other undone[1]," and by associations elsewhere supply, according to their ability, that species of knowledge to the poor, which our society cannot with consistency offer, the cause of not the Church alone, but of Christianity itself, will no doubt be greatly forwarded; and this disgusting controversy, like the carcass of Samson's lion, will be the means of enriching the world with added industry, and sweetness, and nourishment.

To those, however, whose means of doing good

[1] St. Matt. xxiii. 23.

are limited, and to those zealous persons who murmur in no doubtful terms at the increased circulation of the Sacred Volume, abounding, as it does abound, beyond all contemporaneous dissemination of human forms; who account the Scriptures an aliment of so doubtful virtue as to become poison unless accompanied by the proper antidote, and had rather men should sit in darkness than that they should attempt to find out light for themselves; to such I would earnestly suggest, that of two advantages, where both cannot be attained, it is an obvious wisdom to pursue the greater; that till our neighbours be supplied with the Scripture, the compositions of human wisdom may for a time give place; that a rule of faith would cease to be a rule, if it needed something whereby itself should be measured; and that if the Scripture be in itself sufficient to salvation, the dispersion of no other tracts or rituals can be of the same necessity.

Of human forms of prayer, and human expositions of the Bible, it may be said in general that they are means of grace warranted by God's word, and profitable to the souls of men. Of our own liturgy and homilies we with thankfulness acknowledge that they breathe the real spirit of Christianity, and unite apostolic wisdom with apostolic purity. But of all such it is confessed that, as they boast no lustre save that which is reflected from Scripture, so they may vanish without obscuring the face of nature, if that great luminary be itself in the midst of Heaven.

The Church of Christ has done without them, and may again dispense with their fainter glimmerings; but if the day spring from on high be intercepted, how shall not the light which is in us be darkened? Be this our glory and our crown, that we have laboured and do labour in the dispersion of these wonderful testimonies; that to this one authority we refer our several claims, convinced that where the word of God is, God Himself is not far distant; that in His presence is light, and by this light shall every man's building be proved, whether it be gold or silver, stubble or hay.

On these grounds, and supported by these reasons, I now entreat your assistance for the Bible Society. Of what we have done already, and what we purpose by your bounty to perform, of the glorious distribution of God's word which has by our means been effected in the Christian world, and of those still wider prospects which the land of "them that sit in darkness" offers, the time forbids me, and I hold it unnecessary, to enlarge. I might tell you of the ignorant enlightened, of the poor made rich, of the prisoner by our means released from a worse captivity; I might point out to you that Germany, from whence our own reformation was derived, now taught and comforted by our filial piety, I might show universal Christendom rejoicing in our light; and hostile nations offering up their prayers for England, the friend of souls; I might boast of the bounds of knowledge extended, and paint genius and learning braving in our cause the toils of barbarous dia-

lects and the terrours of pestilential climates. Your attention might, lastly, be directed to those mighty fields whose harvest has not yet sounded under the Christian reaping hook, to benighted Africa waiting for our illumination, and to those vast regions of Indian ignorance which Providence has planted under our country's care. But I need not urge you farther; these things have not been done in a corner; our sound has gone forth into all lands, and our words unto the ends of the earth; and as you wish these blessings to continue, and these hopes to be realized, the world itself, for whose spiritual instruction I plead, in God's name demands your assistance. I entreat you then, my brethren, as you would not be found wanting in the work of Christ, to join our holy fellowship; as you would escape the curse pronounced against those who come not forth to the help of the Lord, I conjure you that you stand not idle in this His victory! But remember, above all things, if you desire these labours to be available to your own salvation, as well as to the salvation of other men, if you hope to partake in those spiritual blessings which your bounty may distribute, remember that we vainly make others wise while our own hearts are blinded and ignorant; that it is not enough to give the Bible to the poor unless we also study it ourselves, and unless our daily prayers and daily actions cherish and display that faith and hope of which this blessed volume is the treasury!

And, oh merciful God, who hast caused all holy

Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us through Jesus Christ our Lord!

SERMON XII.

THE DUTIES OF THE MINISTRY.

[Preached at Chester, 1819.*]

MATT. ix. 38.

Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

WHAT is meant by this harvest of the Almighty Father, and what manner of labourers they were for whom the disciples of our Lord are instructed thus to pray, are points which require no explanation. There are two questions, however, which naturally arise from these words of Christ: First. Whether the injunction here given to pray for a supply of ministers in His Church were confined to the apostles alone, or whether it extend to every Christian and every age of Christianity? Secondly. In what manner they who offered such a prayer

* This Sermon was published with the following Dedicaton:

"TO THE RIGHT REV. GEORGE HENRY LAW, D.D. LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER, [BATH AND WELLS,] WHOSE TALENTS AND VIRTUES HAVE ENDEARED HIM TO THE CLERGY OF HIS OWN AND EVERY NEIGHBOURING DIOCESE, THE FOLLOWING SERMON, PUBLISHED IN DEFERENCE TO HIS OPINION, IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED."

were to look for its fulfilment from God, and by what actions of their own they were to concur with and forward the accomplishment of their devout desires? In other words, we are led to examine the necessity of a continued succession of Christian teachers, and the means whereby this succession is to be preserved and rendered effectual.

I. That a due supply and succession of preachers and ministers of the Gospel is a circumstance of the greatest importance and necessity to the extension and perpetuation of truth, to the knowledge and happiness of mankind, and to the glory of our common Master, is a truth which a moderate acquaintance with the history of the world, and even a careless survey of its present state will easily enable us to determine. There have, indeed, at different periods of Christianity, been found some enthusiastic believers who, by a too literal application to the militant Church, of expressions by which the prophets have described her triumphant condition, have been induced to renounce and deprecate all human means of instruction as derogating from that abundant and universal illumination of the Spirit, which was to be the distinguishing glory of the Messiah's sovereignty.

But to a fancy of this kind the facts which we behold are a sufficient answer, inasmuch as, understand the passages in question as literally as we please, it is certain that they cannot apply in such a literal sense to the actual condition of human beings. In no sense can it be said that the time

is arrived, when "the knowledge of the Lord should cover the world as the waters cover the sea." And, in a literal sense, it certainly cannot be pretended that the majority of Christians enjoy such a communion with their Maker, as that none should need to teach his neighbour, seeing that all were taught of God. Not yet the harvest of the Son of Man is reaped, nor has the number of His labourers been, as yet, at any time, adequate to the accomplishment of the aweful work before them. Besides the boundless extent of heathen nations, which even now are ready for the sickle, and who chide, even now, the delays which detain the missionary from their neglected furrows, in those lands which Heaven has most favoured, and which have been most abundantly traversed by Heaven's appointed labourers, how vast a gleaning yet remains of the souls who have escaped our diligence, how abundant a crop is daily rising round us, on which the diligence of our successors must be exerted!

They are not the heathen only, they are not those whom the grosser darkness covers, and who have abided, thus far, in the land of the shadows of death; they are not these alone who wait for our aid, and in whose behalf we need new helpers. There are those who, already regenerate, require renewal and confirmation; who, having once enjoyed the light of truth, have shrunk back into the shades of ungodliness; who panting after the waters of comfort, have sought for them in strange and broken cisterns, and whom it behoves us to

conduct to that true and living well, of which whoso drinketh, shall thirst no more.

So long as these iniquities abound, so long as these errours prevail, so long is it our part, our interest, and our privilege, to ask light for them that sit in darkness, and support for them that are weak; refreshment for them that travail and are heavy laden; and, in order to these ends, to pray the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth to His field, the needful supply of spiritual husbandmen.

Accordingly, so far was the Author of our religion from countenancing any such hope of universal and equal illumination, that, when, on his own departure from the world, he gave commission to His apostles to preach the Gospel, He assured them, at the same time, that His spiritual presence and aid should remain with them till His second and visible advent in glory. "The end of the world" was first to come, before His assistance was to be withdrawn, and, since this assistance was promised them not generally as Christians, but in their appropriate character of ministers of the Gospel, it follows, that their ministry, or the ministry of others like themselves, was not to find an end till the great and final sabbath of nature.

It is not, indeed, the prevalent errour of the present times, either to deny the necessity or underrate the importance of the evangelical office, or of that constant supply of labourers which the wants of Christ's harvest continue every day to call for with

increasing earnestness. On the other hand it is rather to be lamented that, while many causes operate to deter men from seeking an admission into the ministry by the regular and legitimate channel, the fences of the sheep-fold are scaled on every side by a crowd of well-meaning but ill-informed volunteers in the cause, who intrude themselves with unfortunate rashness into an office, the labour and anxiety of which are only to be learned by experience; and incumber by their disorderly efforts, the work which, I willingly bear them witness, it is their earnest desire to forward.

This errour (for such I hope to prove it) is in a great degree, of modern origin. The ancient opponents of our Church, in the days of James and Charles, were, for the most part, as fully convinced as ourselves, of the necessity of Church union, and the advantages of a legitimate ministry; though they denied to the Church of England the character of a true Church of Christ, and though *their* ordination wanted, in our opinion, the sanction of apostolic authority. But the question then agitated between us was not whether a schism, or unnecessary separation from the body of the Church was not sinful (since both parties allowed that it was a sin of no ordinary dye), but whether the Church of England was so corrupt and idolatrous as to have forfeited the allegiance of her members; not whether an external authoritative call from the rulers of the Church was needful to designate a Christian minister, (for both sides were by far too well read

in the Scriptures and ecclesiastical antiquity to make a doubt about the matter), but whether this power of admission and ordination resided with the presbytery or with the bishop, and whether the authority of this last was an usurpation of the darker ages, or really founded on inspired and apostolic precedent.

At present, by far the greater number of those who have separated from our Church appear, so far as I have conversed with them, to find little, if any, fault with her doctrines, and to regard her discipline with perfect indifference. Ask any member of an ordinary dissenting congregation the grounds of his secession from the worship of his forefathers, and he will most probably answer that he has some personal objection to his parochial minister, that he prefers the style of singing, or the extemporaneous eloquence of the place which he frequents, and that he has had no more thought of asking his new teacher by what authority he dispensed the word of God and His Sacraments, than of demanding similar credentials from a performer on the stage. Even among the preachers themselves, and the best informed of their number, it is not unusual to find individuals who are singularly blind to the guilt of schism, and the existence of the Church as a visible and regular society. Far from thinking communion with us unlawful, they are often ready to do ample and liberal justice to the purity of our creed, and the majestic forms of our ritual. If asked the reason of their separation

from us, it is not unusual to hear them reply, that, having a sincere desire to serve God in the work of His ministry, they applied to that religious society where admittance was most easy, or where they anticipated the most advantageous field for their abilities. That they regard the form of ordination, and the persons by whom it may be conferred, as a question of decency and human expedience only; that every thing essential is, in fact, bestowed when God has given the talents and the will to preach the Gospel; and that the teacher who faithfully proclaims the good tidings of salvation, and whose ministry is owned by God in the effects which it produces on his hearers, by whomsoever he may have been ordained, and whether he be ordained or not, is a sound member of the Catholic Church of Christ, and a legitimate labourer in His harvest.

Nor can we wonder, when such opinions are so openly avowed and so widely disseminated, that the consequence should be a multiplicity of masters beyond all which Babel itself could show; that abuses take place which the well-meaning men whom I have mentioned are themselves among the first to deplore; that a bold tongue and fluent utterance are the only requisites needful to attract disciples; and that, while our hearers fluctuate as choice or chance shall guide them amid these various rival establishments, the preacher, of whatever sect, too late begins to discover that, instead of being able to give an account with joy of the

souls committed to his care, he has been weaving a rope of sand, which the first adverse accident is sufficient to dissipate. Surely, when so many of our brethren round us are thus habitually regardless of what we esteem most sacred; when so many of our own Church are sliding by degrees into the same latitudinarian indifference, it is well worth our while to examine impartially the reasons alleged for their neglect and our confidence; to ascertain whether these solemn invocations of the Spirit of God be indeed no more than an empty show, or whether it may not be possible to convince our antagonists of the weakness of their grounds of defence, and the danger of their spiritual condition.

The arguments which are generally advanced in defence of that conduct which I have been deploring may be fairly reduced to the following:—

It is contended that the right of preaching the Gospel and explaining the word of God is a right which belongs to every person to whom God has given the talents and the will to exercise it. "If," say they, "it is not our privilege only but our duty to give of our superabundance in worldly goods to the relief of our perishing brother; if we need no further warrant to clothe the naked, visit the sick, or feed the hungry, than the perception of their distress, of our own ability, and of the grace of God which fans in our hearts the flame of charity, why should we seek any more definite commission than this to impart to others those spiritual gifts which

we ourselves have received most freely? Who shall forbid his brother to cast out devils in the name of their common Master? or, having himself experienced the power of religion, to declare to his fellow-sinners what Christ hath done for his soul, and exhort them to taste and see how gracious is the Lord who calleth them? What, if he follow not with us? Did Moses forbid Eldad and Medad to prophesy? or did he not rather express his desire that all the people of the Lord were gifted in like manner? St. Paul," they tell us, "rejoiced in the diffusion of the Gospel, though by preachers at variance with himself, and actuated by the most unworthy motives. And, therefore," they maintain, "not only are the hearers of such ministers as these abundantly justified in exercising such an option (which, indeed, is a necessary consequence if the ministers themselves be engaged in a work which God sanctions and approves), but other preachers of the Gospel are bound, so long as the doctrine thus delivered is unexceptionable, to regard them as labourers in the same good cause with themselves, to rejoice in their success, and to extend to them the right hand of fellowship."

Now in this chain of argument there are some very considerable fallacies:—

It is, in the first place, by no means accurate reasoning to say that, because it is our duty generally to forward the progress of Christ's kingdom among men, and generally to relieve to the utmost of our power the spiritual as well as temporal wants

of our brethren, it is, therefore, our duty or even our privilege to pursue these objects in whatever way seems to ourselves most likely to attain them, without regard to the authority of those whose experience exceeds our own, or to the restrictions, if such are to be found, which the Holy Ghost has given us in Scripture. The privilege or even the obligation to do a thing in some manner may be allowed, but the propriety of attempting it in whatever manner we please will not be contended for by any who recollect that all laws, whether human or divine, are far less occupied in the discussion of general principles than in the moderation and direction of such principles to proper objects, and in an advantageous channel.

Thus it is, beyond all doubt, the duty and privilege of all God's children to honour and worship Him to the utmost of their ability. But if any man should think fit to honour God by a human sacrifice, or worship Him under the form of a golden image, we should certainly remind him that God had forbidden such injudicious tokens of respect, and that his perseverance in offering them would draw down a curse instead of a blessing. Again, it was unquestionably the duty of every Israelite to be zealous for the safeguard and preservation of the ark of the covenant and those holy relics which were the symbols of God's sovereignty over His people, and the pledges of His peculiar presence among them. But we find, nevertheless, the intrusion of the men of Bethshemesh and the indis-

creet forwardness of Uzzah chastised by God Himself with no less a penalty than death, though both the one and the other appear to have arisen from an anxiety laudable in itself, and of which the application only was blameable. In like manner the person who, in his indiscriminate zeal to give alms, should collect a rabble daily round his door, to the disturbance and terrour of his industrious townsmen, or who, in his anxious love of justice, should usurp, without legal authority, the office of judge and divider of men's possessions, would plead with very little effect the general commandment to "do righteousness and to love mercy." And till it can be shown that every man is a competent judge of his own pretensions to the ministry of Christ's Gospel, or that the indiscriminate assumption of the ministerial character has not a natural tendency to lower the estimation and influence of that character, and to distract men's minds with the grossest doctrinal errours, so long it must appear that, on the grounds of general expediency, the person, however qualified, who takes this office on himself, is establishing a precedent hurtful to mankind, and displeasing, therefore, to Him who has declared Himself the God of order.

For if these arguments apply to the indiscreet practice of all duties whatever, much more do they apply to an assumption of the office in question; inasmuch as (apparently from the very proneness of our nature to its abuse) there is no duty the exercise of which is laid under so many restraints by

the Author of the Sacred Volume. We no where in Scripture read a caution against an over forwardness in alms-giving, an over diligence in prayer, or an over anxious attendance on the sick and the prisoner; but it is, "My brethren be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation!" They are described as perilous times when men, "having itching ears, shall heap to themselves teachers [2];" and as the honour of the ancient priesthood no man took unto himself unless he was called of God, as was Aaron, and as the Lord complained of the Jewish prophets, "I have not sent them, and yet they ran [3];" so, under the new covenant, no man can undertake to preach "unless he be sent;" and it is for God alone to send into His harvest a succession of acceptable labourers.

Nor let it be said that in the notion of this sending, nothing more is implied than is answered by those abilities and that desire to serve God in the ministry of His Gospel, which, when real, I am ready to admit, are as much the gifts of God, and do as truly, though not so perceptibly, proceed from the providential government and ordinary influence of His Spirit, as if the rushing mighty wind of the same Spirit had visited our solitude, or the lambent flame of God's unction had designated us to His future service. I admit, that without such a consciousness of the talents and dispositions necessary, we must commit a grievous sin when we intrude into the

[1] St. James iii. 1. [2] 2 Tim. iv. 3. [3] Jer. xxiii. 21.

sacred office; and I admit that, with this consciousness, where the other requisites are also found, we are justified, in humble hope, to believe ourselves called by the Holy Ghost. But besides this general fitness, which may be given to many, an outward seal and ratification is, from the necessity of the case, required, both as a mark to other men that our services are accepted by God, and as an evidence to ourselves (the only sufficient evidence which can be ordinarily expected) that our calling is indeed from the Most High, and that we are not deceiving ourselves, nor deceived by our spiritual enemies, when we conceive ourselves qualified to preach the Gospel with our mouths, and to adorn its profession by our practice.

For it is well worth our while to observe that, so far from the will and the talent to preach conferring on any person a natural right to preach the Gospel, there were many persons possessed of both these, whom, nevertheless, the apostles expressly excluded from the public ministry. There are, doubtless, very many women whom God has endued with as eminent abilities to preach the Gospel, and we know there have been some who fancied as strong an internal call to this work as most of those men can profess, who, on these grounds, aspire to the ministry. Yet where can we find a more positive prohibition than that which forbids every woman, whatever her pretensions, to teach in the assemblies of the faithful? Nor even in the case of men, and of men who had received an extraordinary communication from the Deity, was the delivery of their

message to depend on their own choice alone, or on the internal impulse which actuated them. The spirits of the prophets themselves were commanded to be subject to the rules laid down by their inspired brethren; they were to speak or to be silent according to the discretion of those who bore rule in the Church, and with due regard to the decencies of a public meeting. What wonder, then, that some further sanction should be necessary to entitle men to exercise, in one particular way, those natural gifts which God may have bestowed on them for a different end, that zeal for His service, for which, if they possess their souls in patience, His Providence may eventually discover another and a more advantageous channel.

But if a further proof is required of the necessity of some outward and authoritative seal of God's appointment, in addition to those faculties and feelings which are suited to the ministerial office, such a proof may be found in the conduct of Him, who is to the Christian Church, in every age, its Guide, its Pattern, and its God; when He consecrated, by the most solemn ordination which the world has seen, a few out of many disciples. We know not whether there were many others equally well qualified with the twelve, for the labour and authority of the apostleship, (one we know there was, who was afterwards added by the Holy Ghost Himself, Matthias the successor of Judas); but we are sure that if ever men were internally adapted by God's grace for that work, it must have been those whom

God Himself chose, and whom He chose from a perfect knowledge of their hearts and tempers. Yet even of these men the internal fitness was not by itself sufficient to authorise them to go forth as God's ambassadors; and it was by laying on of hands, with fasting and earnest prayer, that the Divine Son of God thought fit to designate them as His servants! Beloved, we are followers of Christ; let us in this also conform to His example.

I am no ways concerned to deny that, as in cases of extreme public danger, every citizen is a soldier, so situations may be conceived, (though I am not aware that any such have occurred since the first preaching of the Gospel) in which any Christian may be authorised and called upon to act as a minister of religion. Far less would I refuse to acknowledge that many of these self-constituted ministers, whose number I deplore, have shown a zeal in the service of our Lord and theirs, which may well call forth our admiration and our godly jealousy. Nor, as any religion is better than no religion at all, can it be doubted that much good has occasionally arisen from their ardent though unauthorised exertions, among those whom the labours of more regular ministers have been unable to reach, or to make impression on. But extreme and imaginary cases are no argument against a general rule; nor, though God may bring forth good out of evil, far more out of errour and mistaken piety, is the evil or the errour therefore justified and rendered blameless. St. Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached even

through envy and strife; and we may find sufficient reason for thankfulness to God, in the diffusion of Christianity by those whom He has not commissioned. But no man would choose to be himself found in the list of St. Paul's envious preachers; and we are warranted, on every principle of brotherly love and regard for our common religion, to call on our brethren to desist from labours from which more evil than good must arise, and for which, as we conceive, they have no sufficient authority.

It has hitherto been my object to show the necessity which there is that the labourers in my text should receive their mission from God in some conspicuous and authoritative manner. It now remains that I should consider the manners in which this may take place; and I am not afraid to say that, neither in reason nor in Scripture, can I discover more than two. The first an immediate illapse of God's anointing Spirit, confirmed by some acknowledged and public miracle; the other an authoritative recognition of our claims, and acceptance of our services, by those persons, whoever they are, to whom God has entrusted this authority.

In the former of these cases, and, where a man comes before us with the proofs of his mission in the broad seal and sign manual of Omnipotence, it is certainly our part to stand still and receive, with that reverence which becomes us, the message of our Almighty Sovereign. It is our part to wish such a one "good luck in the name of the Lord," and

(the reality of his powers being ascertained) to acquiesce in all such of his mandates as agree with the analogy of faith, and the Gospel which we have once received. And this may seem to show how strangely inapplicable to the cause to which they have been perverted, are the passages already cited in Numbers xi. and Mark ix. inasmuch as both Eldad and Medad, and the person who cast out devils, were actually possessed of powers which were sufficient evidence of God's favour.

It was plain that no man whom Christ had not chosen could work a miracle in Christ's name; and when Eldad and Medad were prophets, and acknowledged as such by Moses himself, it would have been a strange presumption in either Moses or his friends to have silenced them. But for private persons, who can neither prophesy nor cast out devils, to assume a prerogative and claim a deference which belong to the prophet and the worker of miracles only, is a conduct which, though not very unusual in practice, is hardly a proper subject for argument on the present solemn occasion.

We must return then, after all, (in ordinary cases, and where an immediate and supernatural commission from the Holy Ghost is neither proved nor pretended), to the appointment and ordination of those among our fellow-creatures who exercise a legitimate authority in the Church of Christ, and who, as being appointed by God, are placed in God's stead, and commissioned by Him to dispense those graces which are necessary for the feeding of

His flock, and to designate those labourers who are thenceforth to work in His harvest.

And having arrived at this point of the discussion, even if that discussion were to proceed no farther, and if the Scriptures had given us no information as to the persons by whom this authority was to be exercised, the validity of our ordinations would still be sufficiently plain, and the danger of separation from, or rebellion against our Church would be sufficiently great and alarming; inasmuch as, where no distinct religious officer was instituted by God, the appointment of such officers must necessarily have devolved on the collective Christian Church, and on those supreme magistrates who, in every Christian country, are the recognized organs of the public will and wisdom. In every case alike, where no prior duty is opposed, "to resist the power is to resist the ordinance of God[1]:" and if Christ had really (as our opponents sometimes maintain He has done) left the form of Church government as undetermined as He has left the forms of civil polity, the commission of our ecclesiastical governors would stand on the same basis with that of our civil government, and disobedience to the lawful rule and lawful commands of either (and what is schism if it be not disobedience?) would, on every principle of common sense and Christian ethics, be alike a contempt not of man but of God His Maker.

It happens, however, to be in our power to show

[1] Rom. xiii. 2.

(if not an explicit direction of Christ for the form of our Church government and the manner of appointing our spiritual guides,) yet a precedent so clear, and a pattern so definite as can leave little doubt of the intentions of our Divine Master, or of the manner in which those intentions were fulfilled by His immediate and inspired disciples. Nor will the force of such precedent and example on the practice of succeeding Christians be regarded as trifling by those who consider that it is on such grounds as these that the obligation rests of many observances which are allowed by all parties to be essential; among which may be classed the baptism of infants, the observance of the Lord's day, and our participation in the Lord's supper[1].

But, without entering into the question of the absolute necessity of this rule, and without judging those other national Churches which have departed from it, it is evident that those Churches are most wise and most fortunate who have continued in the path which Christ and His Apostles have trodden before; and that religious insubordination is then most unreasonable and most dangerous, when exerted against a form of polity which the majority of our fellow-christians, the wisdom of our civil governors, and the full stream of precedent, from the time of the apostles themselves, combine to recommend to our reverence.

We find, accordingly, that our Lord, on His own departure from the world, committed, in most so-

[1] See Jer. Taylor, Episcopacy asserted, sect. xix.

lemn terms, the government of His Church to His apostles. We find these apostles, in the exercise of the authority thus received, appointing elders in every city, as dispensers of the word and the sacraments of religion; and we find them also appointing other ecclesiastical officers, who were to have the oversight of these elders themselves, and who, in addition to the powers which they enjoyed in common with them, had the privilege, which the others had not, of admitting, by the imposition of hands, those whom they thought fit, to the ministerial office.

We find the distinction between bishops and presbyters which is here implied, confirmed in the strongest terms by the ecclesiastical writers who come nearest to the apostolic age; by some who were themselves contemporaries with the apostles; by others, of undoubted learning and diligence, who made it their business to collect and illustrate the history of the primitive times; and we find it, above all, confirmed by the fact (which rests on as good foundation as the succession of the Roman emperors, or the earlier English kings), that catalogues of such bishops, as distinct from and superior to the general body of presbyters, were preserved in all the principal Churches of the east, from the time of the apostles down to that of Eusebius and Socrates.

And it is not too much to say, that we may challenge those who differ from us to point out any single period at which the Church has been desti-

tute of such a body of officers, laying claim to an authority derived by the imposition of hands from the apostles themselves; or any single instance of a Church without this form of government, till the Church of Geneva, at first from necessity, and afterwards from a mistaken exposition of Scripture, supplied the place of a single bishop by the rules of an oligarchical presbytery.

Nor is more required to prove to a candid mind, that, in retaining the rule of episcopal ordination, our Church has retained an institution sanctioned on the three grand rules, "quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus;" and that, where our rulers thus send forth their annual supply of labourers into the harvest of the Lord, they send them forth in the same manner, by the same derivative authority, and under the promised sanction of the same Eternal Spirit who sent forth Barnabas and Paul to the work of converting the Gentiles, and in whose name the latter apostle appointed Titus in Crete, and Timothy in Asia.

Nor let it be supposed that, in thus magnifying the grace whereby we are called, we are disposed to magnify our personal consequence, or to usurp a vain and fantastic sovereignty over that congregation of the Lord, of which, by the washing of regeneration, the humblest member is holy. We know, and God forbid that we should forget it, that He who sent forth His only Son not to be ministered unto but to minister, has sent us forth not as lords, but as servants of the faithful. We know,

and God forbid that we should cease to bear in mind, that the more aweful the source from which our commission is derived, the greater necessity is laid on us to labour diligently in our calling, the heavier woe if we neglect to preach the Gospel. It is God Himself who sends us forth into His harvest; it is God Himself who bids us feed His flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers; it is God Himself who sets us as watchmen in Israel, and who will exact one day a strict account of the souls who perish through our negligence! And is this an elevating prospect? Is this a view of things which can raise our opinion of ourselves? Or shall we not rather, when comparing our own weakness with the dreadful responsibility hanging over us, shall we not rather cry out, as Moses cried out in the wilderness, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me; wherefore hast thou thus afflicted thy servant that thou layest the burthen of all this people upon him[1]?" And, believe me, there are moments in the ministerial life of almost every man, when no escape could be found from the intolerable weight of sensations like these, if it were not in the recollection that, as God hath sent us, so is God our strength and sufficiency; that, however vast the harvest, and the labourers however few, no single diligent labourer shall be disappointed of his final reward, and that "he who goeth on his way weeping and bearing precious seed, shall doubtless return with joy bringing his sheaves with him!"

[1] Numb. xi. 14. 11.

And that we who are already gone forth in the armies of the Son of God, and that they who have even now, in spirit, devoted themselves to His service, may be strong in the day of trouble, and humble in the hour of success; that we may be enabled hereafter to give a joyful account of our ministry; that the Lord of the harvest may send forth a perpetual succession of faithful and diligent labourers; and that our Church, which, like the house of Recab, cleaves firmly to the institution of our fathers, may, like that house, never want a man to stand before the Lord for ever, let me entreat your humble and earnest prayers on our behalf, on theirs, and on your own, to Him who is the Governor, the Guide, and Guardian of Christ's family; who is to be sought for by faith, and whose presence, even unto the end of the world, is promised to His faithful ministers, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter.

To Him, with the Father and the Eternal Son, be, now and ever, all praise and glory!

SERMON XIII.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THE POOR.

[Preached before the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, at St. Paul's Cathedral, in June, 1823.]

LUKE vii. 22.

To the poor the Gospel is preached.

IT was observed by the prophet Isaiah as one of the principal marks by which the Messiah, when He came, should be known; and it was urged by our Lord to the disciples of St. John, as an argument that He was in truth that Divine Person whom the ancient prophets had foretold; that the Gospel of Salvation, in the widest meaning of the term, with all its component mysteries, its accompanying lessons, and its gracious consequences, was preached by Him (as He afterwards provided that it should be preached in His name) to the humbler orders of society.

The desire of knowledge is natural to man; and, as it is mercifully so contrived by our Maker, that the communication of knowledge is also, under ordinary circumstances, attended with pleasure,—it might have been, perhaps, anticipated that no single religion could have laid claim to such a cir-

cumstance as a peculiar and distinctive character; but that all sects alike would have been anxious to communicate to all those arguments, by which they were themselves convinced; those doctrines, which they themselves received as sacred; and that a more than common care would have been expressed by the mighty and the wise, to impart a knowledge of their duty, and of those principles by which its practice was enforced, to those on whose virtue was built the tranquillity of the world, while, by the difficulties and privations to which they were exposed, their virtue (even more than the rest of mankind) might seem in danger.

The truth however is, (and it is one, which no Christian can recollect without abundant gratitude for the far different spirit, by which his own Divine Teacher was animated,) that, before the coming of our Lord, and, at this day with very few exceptions, in those countries where the light of the Gospel is as yet unknown, this duty of enlightening and improving the bulk of mankind was a duty of which the obligation was not perceived at all, or which, if perceived, was very imperfectly practised even by those, who professed themselves most concerned for the honour and welfare of the human race, and who had themselves obtained the least imperfect view of the hopes, the duties, and destinies of humanity.

I do not only mean that the possessors of a persecuted and dangerous truth were, among the heathen nations of antiquity, disposed to confine

its knowledge to a few confidential disciples; I do not only mean that the purer deists of Greece and Rome had avowedly an outer and an inner school, of which the latter was by far the least numerous. The ancient philosopher, however bright his views might seem amid the surrounding darkness of his countrymen, had not that clearness of hope, nor that fulness of conviction, nor that assurance of the approbation and protection of an all-bounteous Master, which alone can be ordinarily sufficient to induce men to struggle against the madness of nations, and which, in the case of the early Christians, converted martyrdom into a crown. But I would more particularly urge on your notice, that the few thus selected were such, generally, as paid the highest for admission; that gratuitous instruction was, in few instances indeed, accorded by the moralists of Paganism; that Socrates himself, (the most disinterested of philosophers), was, in point of fact, chiefly attended by the richest and noblest of the youth of Athens; and that even the religious systems, such as they were, which were patronised by the state, and, on the belief of which by the multitude, the public tranquillity, the public honesty, the sanction of oaths, and the security of every man's prosperity and life depended, were never, or in no effectual manner, communicated and enforced to the great bulk of those who, it was expected, were to be swayed by them.

Of the stupendous fabrics, which, in the youth and vigour of superstition, the genius of abomina-

tion and idolatry, erected on the shores of the Euphrates, the Tigris, or the Nile, enough may yet be traced amid their ruins to inform us that the systems, which they were intended to uphold, were made up of exclusion and mystery. A long and painful initiation, which the man of leisure could alone command; a succession of expiatory sacrifices, which the poor man could not supply; a peculiar and inconvenient habit, which the laborious man could not adopt, determined, without any further or more express limitation, the numbers and situation in life of the Chaldean and Assyrian aspirants in theology. In Egypt the profession and attainment of divine knowledge was, for many ages, restricted to a single tribe; and with how much care that priesthood concealed their institutes from the general eye, their continued and almost exclusive employment of a character known to themselves alone is, in itself, a sufficient evidence. The Greeks and Romans (however communicative of other science,) in these respects followed the example of their Coptic and Chaldaic masters: and it is no less true than strange, that for the diffusion of the most accredited doctrines, for the elucidation of the most popular and honoured superstitions, for the persuasion to the most sacred and acknowledged duties, it does not appear that, so far as the poor and the populace were concerned, any provision was made in the wisest republics of antiquity; or that such provision was supplied, in any single instance, by

the religious zeal or the enlightened benevolence of individuals or voluntary associations.

The populace had their priests indeed, and sacrifices, and hymns, and symbols. But the priests were sacrificers, not preachers; their business was but to scatter incense on the flames, to bind the sacred garland round the victim's horns, to lead him to the block and to slaughter him in the method prescribed by their ancestors. The sacrifices, by themselves, could afford as little of instruction as of real expiation; the hymns were often studiously muttered in an under tone, and reverentially couched under obscure and obsolete expressions; while the symbols had need to be themselves explained, and were professedly thus explained in mysteries, from which the slaves and the populace were excluded. To these last no source of knowledge remained but a few ancient poems, a few unauthorized and discordant traditions; legends of which the wealthier and more educated classes hardly affected to conceal their scorn, any more than they did of that vulgar, whose appellation was synonymous with profane, and whom they excluded, under that name, from all participation in the most sacred ceremonies of their common religion.

Accordingly, it was not for the poor that the tree of knowledge grew. The rulers and lawgivers of the world had fenced around its stem with far other guard than the sword of the ancient cherubim, and repelled, with more than

neglect their subjects and their brethren from all familiarity with the topics, in which all mankind are the most deeply interested. Enough, it was apprehended, for the cause of truth, enough for the welfare of mankind, and that obedience in which their welfare consisted, that the wealthy and the learned should understand the nature and the will of the Deity; that they alone should take their seats behind the scenes of the political engine, and, by the great pageant which they guided of religious mummery, of incense and idols, should keep in awe those multitudes, whom they cared not to improve, and whom they secretly dreaded to enlighten.

With the Jews, indeed, the case was somewhat different. Concealment and mystery were altogether abhorrent from the genius of their law, and from the circumstances under which that Divine law was originally given to their nation. Those statutes which had reference to the conduct of every Israelite, and which every Israelite, as he valued his life, was bound to keep inviolate, every individual of whatever rank, (in truth the distinction of ranks in the ancient Israelitish republic was so slight as scarcely to influence any circumstance of their customs or manners,) every individual of whatever rank was alike enjoined to study; while the few and simple principles of theology on which those laws depended, were proclaimed in thunder to the assembled multitude, and no subject, therefore, of concealment or erudition. And,

in the law of Moses itself, and still more in many passages of the Psalms and the prophecies, there is abundant reason to believe, that those public readings and public expositions of the law (which Ezra revived and adapted to the circumstances of his people after their captivity) were coeval, or nearly so, with the law itself, and the sources of light and knowledge to the many thousands of Jehovah's people.

Yet, even here, at the time of our Saviour's advent, had the pernicious ingenuity of man been busily and successfully occupied in obscuring and perverting that light, which they could not wholly intercept from their humbler brethren, in creating difficulties in that which was really plain, and in establishing a monopoly of interpretation for these difficulties thus fantastically brought forward. By their vain and unauthorized glosses, by their doctrine of a double and secret sense in the most simple expressions of Scripture, and by their pretences to the possession of a yet more holy traditionary code, the knowledge of which was confined to the scribes and the rabbins alone, these last had deluded their countrymen into a mysterious reverence for those arcana, into which they were not allowed to enter, and which in their secret schools, and to their select disciples only, the successors of Moses were accustomed, as they said, to communicate. And, while a wild and preposterous value was attached to such researches; while opprobrious names were lavished on "the men of the earth," the "vulgar," the "unlearned," and the

"people that have not the law," these same doctors were so far from any readiness in imparting their hidden treasures, that they absolutely discouraged all study of the law itself in the majority of their countrymen, by declaring that a "female pharisee was enough to destroy the world," and that, (I am almost ashamed to repeat a sentiment so ridiculous, and so utterly detestable,) "the Spirit of the Lord was never known to rest on a poor man."

Far different, however, from this exclusive and monopolizing reserve, is the spirit of the Christian Religion. As Christ came not into the world for the political interest of the wealthy, or the vain curiosity of the wise; as the object of His birth, His life, His death, and resurrection was the salvation of those many millions of rich and poor, who all equally required His teaching, His help, and His mercy; His coming, as the day-star, shone alike on all. To the hope which He brought the universal world was heir; and while His revelation may afford a never-ceasing subject of wonder and enquiry for the best and most cultivated understanding; while angels have desired to look into the mysteries of our faith, its plain and peaceful doctrines speak the genuine language of nature, who, as the common parent of all, is understood by the meanest of her offspring.

Accordingly, in no single circumstance of conduct did our Lord more completely differ from the philosophers and moralists of the heathen world, or from those Jewish doctors who, in His day, and since

His return to His Father, have occupied the chair of Moses, than in the general publicity of His doctrine, (for "in secret He taught nothing;" and those things, which His disciples privately enquired from Him, were not doctrinal but prophetic,) and in the especial application of His words of comfort and instruction to the necessities of the ignorant and the poor. It was to them He chiefly preached; it was among them that His life was chiefly spent; His constant attendants and familiar friends were, with few exceptions, chosen from among their number; and He thanks His Father, in words most solemn and remarkable, that not so much the wise and learned as the babes, the ignorant of the earth, had received His person, and appreciated His miracles.

The diffusion, accordingly, of religious knowledge among the poor, as it was one main distinction of the mission and doctrine of our Lord, so it has continued, from the continued necessity of the case, in every age of the Church, the duty of every Christian community, and one of the most convincing proofs, which such a community can supply, of the purity of their faith, and the warmth and wisdom of their charity. Where this is neglected, one main end and object of Christ's coming into the world is disregarded; the eternal interests of a great majority of the human race are wantonly and impiously trifled with; and they, whom the meek and merciful Saviour of all distinguished by a peculiar measure of regard and tenderness, are excluded (so far as it is in our power to exclude them,) from the

hopes and the graces of Christianity. Whatever, then, may be the outward profession of any religious society, its doctrine, however pure, and its liberality, in other instances, however splendid; it is unworthy the title of a Church of Christ, or is, at best, a candlestick deprived of its illuminating flame, if the religious interests of the poor are consigned to chance or darkness.

Nor is it to be supposed, as the world too often appears, (in its practice at least,) to take for granted, that for such neglect, where it exists, the clergy are alone responsible; or that *our* exertions only are needed in order to bring to the knowledge of the ignorant and the poor, the good tidings of pardon and grace, and the wholesome and necessary doctrines of repentance, and faith, and holiness. God forbid, that I should detract from the tremendous obligation which, indisputably, rests on our order, to labour beyond all other men, and in a manner to which no other men are obliged or authorised, in the dissemination of religious knowledge, in expounding and persuading the things of the kingdom of God, and, both "in season and out of season," in preaching this Gospel, which we have received, to every creature. As little am I inclined to deny or undervalue the efficacy of those oral instructions, (that foolishness of preaching, as the wise men of antiquity contemptuously called it, but which, ere they had ceased to despise it, they were by its effects compelled to fear,) by which the Gospel of Christ was, in the first instance, triumphantly

disseminated; by which alone, (of human means,) the impressions of a religious education may be retraced or preserved indelible; and an attendance on which, (when mixed with knowledge in the guide, and faith in the hearer,) is now, as at first it was, the great power of God unto salvation. But, that a sermon should profit, it is necessary that it should be heard; it is necessary that it should be heard with understanding. And, when that strange reluctance is considered, with which men unimbued with early religious impressions resort to our public ministry; when we take into account the aweful and mysterious nature of many of those topics which we are enforced to treat upon; when we recollect the shortness and paucity of those opportunities of attracting attention which are ordinarily in our power, or which the indifference and indolence of the world will permit us to render effectual; can we wonder that something more than sermons is required for that mighty work which is set before us? A hundred half hours in the year, (and this is the average amount of attention which the most zealous preacher can obtain in Church, and, when the additional and week-day labours of a zealous minister are taken into account, even more than the average amount of labour which the constitution of many preachers can support,) are surely all too little for the restoration of a corrupt and fallen race, for the institution of men into angels! And the ministers of Christ have a right; a right do I say? it is our solemn and bounden duty, in the

name of God and of His Son, to call on every assistance of rank, and wealth, and knowledge, and example, to aid us in our gigantic task of turning the inhabitants of the earth to righteousness!

It is not, indeed, required; it is not even to be desired or admitted, on the principles of Christian order, or of that wisest and safest form of polity, which the infant Church received from the inspired and confidential followers of her Divine Founder; it is not required that the hand should usurp the office of the tongue; that the laity should undertake the function of public preachers; that, having itching ears, they should heap to themselves many masters, and impede and entangle, by irregular and unauthorised exertions, the good cause which they desire to forward. But, as it is the appropriate duty of the clergy to preach, so are the laity, on their part, required to furnish every requisite means for rendering that preaching effectual. It is their duty, by the maintenance of an adequate ministry, by the supply of sufficient and accessible places of worship, by private example, by public countenance, and above all, by the Christian education of the ignorant and the young, to provide that the Gospel be really brought to the ears of all who are interested in its message, that for the neglect of its sacred lessons the sinner only may be responsible, and that if any are still ignorant, it at least may not be imputed as a national crime that they perish through the lack of knowledge!

If to see our brother hunger, and not to relieve

his bodily wants be a violation of every principle which is lovely before men, and in the eyes of God acceptable; if at our everlasting peril we are bound, (so far as power is given us) to furnish them that need with the meat which perisheth, and the water, whereof if a man drinketh, he shall thirst again; of how much sorer punishment must they be worthy who can behold the souls of their fellow-creatures perishing for lack of instruction without some little care to provide for them the bread of immortality, and, happy themselves in their knowledge of the truth, are indifferent to the destiny of those with whom they dwell, whose hard and daily labour ministers to their wants and luxuries; on whose honesty and forbearance their own security depends, and who would repay tenfold by their love, their services, and their prayers, whatever lessons of content and holiness they receive through our munificence? "Cursed be he," said God under the Old Testament, "cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way.[1]" And shall he escape without a still heavier malediction—shall that nation, shall that individual go free from the dreadful displeasure of the Almighty, who gives over without compunction to the perilous wanderings of spiritual blindness those unhappy persons, whose ignorance a little care, a little cost, the renunciation of a single expensive indulgence might have guided to light and everlasting happiness? It is not, I repeat, the duty, it is not the interest of the clergy *alone*, or more

[1] Deut. xxvii. 18.

than others, to desire the advancement of Christ's kingdom. For that kingdom, its coming, and final triumph, all believers alike are commanded by their Lord to pray. But to that kingdom it is an essential preliminary that "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea[1]:" nor let any of us hereafter address the Searcher of hearts with the petition, that His "will may be done on earth as it is in heaven," without recollecting, that on each of us it in part depends to forward that desire by our own exertions: and that it is a mockery of God to ask of Him, that sinners may be brought to repentance, while we contribute all the while, neither attention nor influence, nor pecuniary aid, to the object for which we thus solemnly profess ourselves solicitous!

I know that it has been urged, (though, thank God! the time is gone by, when the education of the poor was opposed on grounds of political economy, and when the coarse and profligate, though acute and fluent, Mandeville resisted those noble institutions, of which the fruits are now before us, as endangering the productive labour of the humbler ranks by educating them above their circumstances) I know it has been urged that, in educating the poor, we give them a power of uncertain and even of dangerous application; that, through the same entrance which we throw open for the admission of truth and holiness, the hostile forms of errour and of vice may enter in; and that there is

[1] Hab. ii. 14.

reason to apprehend from the corruption of our nature, the seduction of novelty, and the various arts resorted to by those, who make the press their instrument for subverting the faith, unsettling the principles, and destroying the happiness of their fellow-creatures, that we shall only increase the temptations of the poor by giving them new opportunities of mental dissipation; and that, while we shall not make any of them much wiser, we shall in all probability render several among them far more wicked.

To all this it might be easy to answer, that it is vain, and worse than vain, to argue against a great benefit because that benefit may be abused; and that there is no single blessing of the Almighty which may not be rendered a source of mischief by the folly and perverseness of His creatures. But, as nothing can be good, of which the probable evil exceeds the probable advantage, it may be more satisfactory to reply (and the reply is happily within our power) that,

1st. The incidental dangers of education are less on the whole, in themselves, and of far less probable occurrence than those which arise from a mind entirely unimproved, and from that lack of occupation, which, in every rank of life, must often be the effect of ignorance.

2dly. That those dangers, such as they are, are not peculiar to the educated man alone, but may exist even where education is most neglected.

And 3dly, That the education for which we contend is not confined to the gift of reading and

writing alone; but is precisely of that nature, which is best adapted to fortify the mind against the pollution of impure suggestion and the assaults of impious sophistry. Even if the worst should happen, I am not sure that the person, whom an unhappy course of reading seduces into infidelity, is in a more hopeless condition, so far as his soul is concerned, than the man who has scarcely learned the name of God at all, and certainly has never been taught to think of God with reverence and devotion; but I am sure that, for one half-educated deist, there are many hundreds of uneducated persons who, practically, and in the general habit of their lives are altogether without God in the world; and it is a question which the common sense of every man will find little difficulty in deciding, whether the possible danger of a few is to counterbalance the certain misery of a multitude.

But are we really so little informed of what is passing around us in this vast metropolis, and in all the other principal seats of a condensed population throughout the land, as to be ignorant, that for a man to receive lessons in profaneness, corruption, and disloyalty, it is by no means necessary that he should first have learned to read? Can we doubt that the ear is as apt a scholar as the eye for forbidden things, and for false and pestilential doctrines? Do we not perceive that the least informed, and most neglected districts of the empire have been those, in truth, where the evils of which we complain have sprung up in the most abundant harvest? Or can we hesitate to determine, that

the best and only prevention or remedy of education misapplied, and of gross and brutal ignorance, is such an education as inclines men to love what is good, and "trains up a child in the way in which we desire him to go," in the well-grounded confidence that, "when he is old, he will not depart from it [1]."

Such an education it was, as I have described, (of which Christianity is the basis, salvation the object, and the words of Scripture and the rituals of our excellent Church the text-books and the manuals) which was alone contemplated by the wise and excellent men, whose zeal and munificence first adorned this city with those schools for which your continued patronage is now solicited. Such an education, (improved in its instrumental part by the application of that admirable system, the knowledge of which is, perhaps, the most illustrious tribute which the east has yet yielded to her conquerors) is that, in my opinion, which is at once best adapted to the nature and the wants of mankind, to the religious interests of a great majority of the English nation, to the stability of our civil and religious institutions, to the salvation of many souls, and to the extension and acceleration of that kingdom and triumph of our Lord, our Saviour and our God, in the expectation of which "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together [2]."

There have been those—there still, perhaps, are some (may the Almighty turn their hearts and

[1] Prov. xxii. 6. [2] Romans viii. 22.

help their understandings?) who have held up the English Church as hostile to general education, as anxious to impede the march of a power which she viewed with jealousy, and as secretly grudging to the poor that light, which it was her peculiar duty to dispense to them. To such calumnies—unfounded at all times, but never more untrue than at the time when it was urged with greatest confidence and bitterness,—the noble spectacle now before you is in itself a sufficient answer. The effect of that spectacle I will not weaken by any observations on it, but I will content myself with reminding you that, how often and to what extent it shall be renewed, how many generations more may receive from these institutions the seeds of light, the habits of virtue, and the hope of immortality, must depend on you and on your bounty. Over the destinies of these innocent creatures now before you; over the destinies of those many thousands more whom even this vast fabric could not contain, but who, like these, are receiving their education in our schools, and of whom these are but the representatives; over the destinies of the generations yet unborn, who may hereafter share in the blessings which these schools supply; over the destinies of that Church, in whose principles they have been thus far carefully instructed; over the destinies of the nation itself, which can only be powerful or happy through the means of an industrious and intelligent, a holy and a happy population; over all these, this day, a strange and ample power is given you.

Is it your pleasure that these things should flourish, or that they should fall? I cannot doubt which way your desires tend: let but your conduct be answerable, and, by the blessing of God, those desires shall receive their sure accomplishment.

One observation more, and I have done. If we behold with interest and emotion the spectacle of so many immortal spirits assembled in the temple of the Lord, and receiving, as heirs of immortality, the blessings of religious instruction through His word and by His ministers; let us remember that they are not the young and ignorant alone who have souls to be saved, and opportunities of grace to answer for: that, if it be desirable for the poor to receive the knowledge of Christ, for the rich to neglect that knowledge can be neither wise, nor safe, nor holy; and that if it be charity to build an ark for our neighbour, it is madness not to enter into it ourselves.

Let, then, your own practice be such as may show you to be in earnest in that anxiety, which you express for the improvement of your fellow-creatures; and, that your religion may be genuine and consistent, let not your prayers be confined to this place alone, but, in the solitude of your closets, and in the circles of your families, no less than in the sanctuary and before the altar of the Most High, call down the blessing of the Holy Ghost on the instructions here afforded, and the benefactions here bestowed, in His name and through His me-

diation, who once in great humility came down to preach His Gospel to the poor, and who once again, on His return in might and majesty to judge both quick and dead amid the flames of an expiring world, and amid the glories of an open Heaven, will not disdain, at His Father's right hand, to call the poor His "brethren!"

SERMON XIV.

RESPECT DUE TO ANTIQUITY.

[Preached at the Assizes at Shrewsbury, 1821.]

JEREMIAH XXXV. 18, 19.

Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you, therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.

ON the persons to whom this memorable promise was made, and on the circumstances under which they received it, a very few observations will be sufficient. It was made to a small Arab tribe, whose ancient name of Kenite had, in the days of Jeremiah, given place to that of Rechabites; who were connected by long friendship and the memory of ancient services with the nations of Judah and Israel; and who, though sojourners in a land of vineyards and corn-fields, and surrounded by a people of agricultural and commercial habits, retained, through many centuries, the simple manners of their Cushite ancestry, their abstemious diet, their pastoral life, and their aversion to settled habitations. They drank, we are told, no wine,

neither built houses, nor sowed seed, nor planted vineyards, but all their lives they dwelt in tents in the land in which they were strangers.

On account of this adherence to their ancient institutions, the Rechabites were held up by the Almighty, as may be seen in this same chapter of Jeremiah, as a contrast to the fickle caprice and restless spirit of innovation by which His own people, the Jews, were so often led astray from the ordinances which He Himself had given to them. And, as if to add more weight to the example thus offered, and as a contrast to that menace of political ruin which He had denounced against the monarchy of Judah, the assurance which I have taken in my text was given to the house of Rechab, that their family should be preserved amid the common ruin of Syria; and that the ancestor whose precepts they had so well observed, should not want a descendant to "stand before the Lord for ever."

That this promise, thus solemnly and explicitly made, has received its exact fulfilment, we have very reasonable grounds to believe, not only from the respect due to the inspired authority of Jeremiah, but from every thing which is known concerning the manners and policy of those tribes which yet wander over the open country of Syria. In our present limited knowledge of those regions, we are unable, indeed, to fix with precision on any one particular clan as the descendants of the ancient Kenites. But many clans there are, and always have been, who, from policy and preference at least

as much as necessity, retain in those wild regions the habits described by the prophet. The use of tents would be no distinguishing mark among the wandering hordes of the desert; and the imposter Mahomet, in forbidding the use of fermented liquors, did no more than comply with a prejudice already universal not only among the Rechabites, but among all the children of Nebaioth, Kedar, and Midian. And it is but reasonable to believe that, though the distinction may have been lost by the feature becoming general, and though the ancient name of the tribe and the memory of their descent may, perhaps, have perished amid the lapse of years and the political revolutions of Asia, yet the word thus spoken by God has not been suffered to fall to the ground, and that the wanderers of the house of Rechab may still continue to prosper under the blessing of the Most High, and to cherish amid their wilderness the institutions of their ancestor Jonadab [1].

[1] At the distance of 2500 years from the date of the prediction, a tribe bearing the name, and answering to the description of the Rechabites, has been discovered in Arabia. Several notices of them occur in the missionary journals of the Rev. Joseph Wolff, published some years after the date of this sermon. Writing at Mousoul, he thus speaks of them: "March 19, 1824: all the Jews in this country believe that the Beni Khaibr, near Mecca and Medina, are the descendants of the ancient Rechabites. The mufti from Merdeen gave me a long description of the Beni Khaibr; but as I have not yet seen them, I will not at present give you his description of them. They are, however, worthy of notice. Those Jews of Khaibr gave infinite

But obscure as their present fate may be, and little as the indefinite prolongation of an obscure

trouble to Mohammed; and he never was able to compel them to embrace his religion. See Sale's note to chap. xlviii. in the Koran, and Herbelot Bibliotheque Orientale." Journal [Lond. 1828], vol. ii. p. 276. In another passage of the same work, (p. 331), he says, "The Jews of Sanaa are firmly convinced that the Beni Khaibr are the descendants of the ancient Rechabites." Again, at a later date, and in a different place, he says: "Nov. 27, 1824. Abraham ben Yahya confirmed the account I had before received of the Rechabites. When I asked him, Do you know the Jews Khaibr? He replied, 'You mean the children of Rechab. These are mighty men, and have not felt the yoke of the captivity.' And then Abraham ben Yahya joyfully lifted up his fingers, and moved them about, and said, 'They are the descendants of Jonadab the son of Rechab, who said, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever; neither shall ye build houses, nor sow seed, &c.; and thus they do. The children of Ishmael curse them, and we bless them. The sword of Mohammed has not brought them under his yoke, &c.'" (Journal of the Rev. Jos. Wolff, in Jewish Expos. 1826, p. 315.) The fullest and most striking passage is the following: "All the Jews, not only of Jerusalem, but likewise those of Yemen, told me, that the Rechabites mentioned in Jeremiah xxxv. were still existing around Mecca; the Mussulmans who performed their pilgrimages to Mecca, confirmed that account: the latter knew them by the name of Khaibaree. On my arrival at Jalooka in Mesopotamia, I saw Jews wandering about among the Yezidi. I asked them, Has never any one of you turned Yezidi, or Mussulman? They replied, 'Oppression cannot bow us, and tyranny cannot shake. *Hear, Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.*' I added, 'And Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God!' And believing them to be Rechabites, on account of their wandering about in the desert, I asked them the question: they replied, No, but here is one who came from Hajaz, i. e. the deserts of Mecca!' I saw one before

and humble pedigree (though a promise admirably adapted to Arab prejudices) would affect or interest a modern European, the few circumstances which, in the present chapter, we are told concerning them, are of a nature by no means unworthy of our serious attention, and conduct to consequences not only curious and important in themselves, but such as are peculiarly appropriate to the present times, and to the occasion which has called us together.

It is, in the first place, as I conceive, apparent that, in the promise here made to the Rechabites by God's prophet and in God's name, and under

me standing, dressed, and wild like an Arab, the bridle of his horse holding in his hand: I shewed to him the Bible in Hebrew and Arabic; he read both languages, and was rejoiced to see the Bible. He was not acquainted with the New Testament. After having proclaimed to him the tidings of salvation, and made to him a present of the Hebrew and Arabic Bibles and Testaments, I asked him, Whose descendant are you? *Mousa*, (this was his name,—with a loud voice) come, I show to you, and then he began to read Jeremiah xxxv. from ver. 5 to 11. *Wolff.* Where do you reside? *Mousa*, (recurring to Gen. x. 27) at Hadoram, now called Samar by the Arabs, at Usal, now called Sanaa by the Arabs, and (Gen. x. 30) at Mesha, now called Mecca, in the deserts around those places. We drink no wine, and plant no vineyard, and sow no seed, and live in tents, as Jonadab our father commanded us. Hobab was our father too; come to us, you will still find 60,000 in number, and you see thus the prophecy has been fulfilled, 'Therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.' And saying this, Mousa the Rechabite mounted his horse, and fled away, and left behind a host of evidence of sacred writ." Journal, vol. ii. p. 333—5. Ed.

His immediate direction, an approbation of their conduct is implied, of which that promise was, in fact, the appropriate reward and sanction, and such a sanction and such a reward as were in the power of God only to bestow, and as He unquestionably would not bestow but on those whom He was, for good reasons, disposed to favour.

True it is that the common experience of ages (and what is this experience but the ascertained and usual manner in which the Almighty directs the fortune of His creatures?) the experience of ages teaches us that, where the institutions of any society are not easily changed, that society is most likely to be of permanent use and prosperous continuance. And if the prophet had said no more than that the modesty of the Rechabites and their reverence for their ancient laws would be found their best security for the independence and prosperity of their little republic, he would have said no more than was warranted by the usual maxims of human wisdom; though the assurance might, beyond a doubt, have acquired additional strength and importance as proceeding, in this instance, from an inspired monitor.

But the assurance which Jeremiah gave them was of a nature far more definite than if it had extended only to that general and ordinary protection, which all communities, whose affairs are conducted with wisdom and integrity, have reason to expect from God's providence. It was the promise of a blessing which cannot be ranked among the natu-

ral effects of any human institution, however wisely ordained and however pertinaciously observed; a promise of continued fruitfulness to a numerous tribe, of continued endurance to a particular nation, not for a few generations only, but so long as the world itself should exist; "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever."

And when we consider that this privilege, than which, to Arabian ears, a greater could hardly be given, was conferred as a reward for the faithful and persevering observance of institutions, such as I have described to you, is it possible that we should fail to notice the reverence which this example teaches for the laws of man's appointment, not only for such as are visibly and immediately conducive to God's glory and the happiness of mankind, but for such as, in themselves indifferent, derive their whole sanction and obligation from the authority of the person from whom they are derived, or from the sacredness of ancient and universal custom? The promise, it will be observed, though of the same general character, is in its application widely different from that which, in the fifth commandment, is held out to those who honour the direct and intimate ties of blood, and the injunctions of a living parent. The person from whom the Rechabites derived the institution or revival of their peculiar laws, though, according to the forms of eastern language, he is called their father, was in truth an ancestor, and a remote one, of a small

part only among their number. Upwards of two hundred years had passed away since their chief or patriarch Jonadab had been courted and conciliated by Jehu: and it must have been as sovereign, not as parent, that he could have possessed so extensive an influence over a tribe which, six hundred years before, and in the days of Moses, was already numerous and important. The observances, too, which he had enjoined were, in themselves, of no moral or religious obligation. They had reference to the usual economy and separate polity of his tribe, and possessed no more of positive importance than the fashion in which a man should wear his hair, or the colour and form of his garment. Yet the Rechabites kept them; and, for thus keeping them, they are praised and rewarded; and it follows, therefore, that an obedience to the laws, as laws, and abstracted from any other consideration, is a duty incumbent on men, and a conduct well pleasing to Him from whom all civil government derives its beginning and authority.

A distinction has, indeed, been made, and made by moralists of no common renown, between the obligation to laws, in their own nature useful and necessary, and to those positive institutions which derive their sanction from the will of a human superior only. The first is admitted to rest on the immutable principles of justice and duty, and to bind the subject not only for wrath but for conscience sake; while the second is supposed to imply no more than the necessity of submitting, if detected, peace-

ably and without evasion, to whatever penalty the state has thought fit to impose. Thus a perpetration of the graver offences against society is acknowledged, on all hands, to be not only illegal but wicked, is not only to be punished by temporal inflictions, but is liable to the censures of conscience, and the burning wrath of the Most High; while, to give a familiar example, the old statute of burying in woollen would have been held by these moralists to have been optional to follow or to transgress by any man who chose to run the risk of the penalty.

Between the cases which I have compared, and in all other comparisons of the same kind, there is certainly a great and aweful interval: and I am ready to admit that, wherever a moral law and a positive institution are at variance; wherever the observance of this last is inconsistent with the performance of a higher duty; wherever its transgression is necessary to produce a preponderant good to the community, to our neighbour and, in certain cases, to ourselves; wherever its observance has become obsolete, and its breach connived at and universal; the conscience of the individual is by no means bound to keep the law, and may even, according to the greatness of the exigency, be absolutely bound to violate it. It was thus that the Rechabites themselves appear to have acted, when, as we read in this same chapter, during the time of the Assyrian invasion, they sought the general safety of their community by a temporary aban-

donment of their Arabian habits, and by forsaking their tents for the houses and ramparts of Jerusalem.

It is the same, indeed, in a greater or less degree, with every positive institution, whether human or Divine. Where a moral duty or a visible necessity interferes, the Almighty, we learn from Scripture itself, "will have mercy and not sacrifice[1];" but where a trifling inconvenience only can be pretended, or when the real reason of our disobedience is no other than an impatience of lawful authority, I can certainly find no ground, either in reason or in Scripture, for thus limiting the conscientious obligation of laws to those laws only, of which we can at once perceive the excellence and propriety. Sure I am that no such distinction is made in the various texts of Holy Writ which enjoin the Christian to "submit himself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake[2];" or which remind us, as a general truth, that whoso resisteth the regular authorities of his country shall receive unto himself damnation.

The truth is that there are very few laws indeed, (perhaps if I had said none, I should have run little risk of refutation,) of which the institution or the continuance has not been grounded in the abatement of some evil or the attainment of some advantage. And if no other advantage is gained than that of accustoming mankind to restraint, and

[1] St. Matt. ix. 13. [2] St. Peter ii. 13. Rom. xiii. 2.

educating in their minds the habits of deference for their rulers in things indifferent, even this advantage will be greater than any which can ordinarily arise from a breach of the law, even if we wave all consideration of the evil which may follow from our setting an example of disobedience in trifles, and weakening, so far as our influence extends, the popular reverence for the institutions of our country.

The conscientious duty, then, incumbent on every individual, to yield obedience in things indifferent, and to the institutions of that society to which he belongs, is the first of those lessons which I am desirous of impressing on your notice from the example of the Rechabites, and the blessing which they received from the Almighty.

A second consideration arising from the same history; and a consideration of still wider importance, which applies not only to individuals and subjects, but to the nations of which those individuals are a part, and the governors to whom those subjects owe obedience, is the veneration which it seems to inculcate for ancient and established forms, and the adherence to those national institutions, the utility or harmlessness of which has stood the test of ages, and the authority of which is built on the associations of early youth, and the transmitted recollections of those to whom our childhood looked up with affection. They were not the individual shepherds alone, with whom Jeremiah held this conversation, but their collective body, and the authorities of their clan, to whom

the blessing of Jehovah was pronounced for their adherence to the commandments and customs of their Arabian ancestry.

Is the present time unseasonable; do the circumstances of the world around us seem to render the task unnecessary of urging such a consideration on the reason and conscience of mankind? or are we not rather called upon by all which we have hitherto enjoyed, and all which we can apprehend in future, by our regard for the temporal and eternal interests of our brethren, and by our reverence for that Holy Name in which kings reign, and princes decree justice, to correct, so far as possible, that overweening contempt for whatever is ancient or established which manifests itself in the popular discourses, the popular writings, the popular actions of our day; to exorcise that evil spirit of change which no longer walks in darkness; and to entreat the world to have mercy on itself ere it proceeds to destroy or damage some of the noblest fabrics which the wisdom of former ages has left behind?

While I lament, however, the increase of this feeling in the minds of my countrymen, I am by no means inclined to attribute its prevalence to any national fickleness of character, or to any causes but those external circumstances of privation and disappointment which have afforded, in the sufferings of the many, a field but too propitious for the malignant exertions of the few.

In spite, indeed, of all those maxims of ancient wisdom, which complain of the desire of novelty as

a natural and inherent principle in the human mind; in spite of the gratification which vanity receives by a supposed emancipation from the trammels of authority, and the readiness often exhibited by the half learned and the half wise in the adoption of new and untried suggestions, I am inclined to believe that the love of novelty, by itself and simply considered, has by no means so great an influence over mankind as to overcome, in ordinary circumstances, the countervailing principle of imitation, or that mockery and dislike by which innovation is always, in the first instance, more or less attended. This very persecution, indeed, is in itself a demonstration that mankind, in general, like not to have their habits or opinions disturbed; and that it is only to minds of a peculiar construction, and already accustomed to turn their thoughts in many different directions, that the stimulus of novelty, abstractedly considered, is pleasing. And the fact is as certain as it is remarkable, that the history of the world supplies no instance of any great or extensive innovation which has not been, in the first instance, opposed by a vast weight of prejudice, or which, when it has triumphed, has not triumphed by slow degrees, and after a violent and tedious struggle.

So forcibly, indeed, have many men been impressed by this phenomenon, that they have called on us to discard entirely as, if not hurtful, at least unnecessary, those cautions against an innovating spirit, in which former ages have dealt so largely;

to exhort men to judge for themselves, and by the light of their own reason, without regard to what others have thought or established before them; to recollect that what we call antiquity was, in fact, the youth of the world, and that in experience and in information we are ourselves wonderfully superior to those ages whence our principal institutions are derived; and which we have been taught to regard with something like superstitious veneration, as hallowed by the wisdom of our ancestors.

Would these reasoners maintain that innovation is in itself a blessing? Are they blind to the consequences by which the progress of even the most beneficial change, provided that change is extensive, is inevitably and calamitously attended? Surely, with these before our eyes and in our recent memories, it is allowable to plead for some degree of caution and discretion in the abatement of even acknowledged abuses, when we recollect that every opinion and every institution is, in proportion to its antiquity and importance, connected with the prosperity of thousands; that none such can be erased without disturbing the entire soil where it grows, or without those indications of agony which, like the screams of the fabled mandrake, involve too often the destroyer and the destroyed in one common and deadly ruin!

But the caution, they will tell us, is unnecessary, inasmuch as the natural bias and disposition of mankind is not so much in favour of novelty as of precedent; and the danger, therefore, will be

not so much that unnecessary change will be sought for as that needful reformation will be resisted. And so far as the natural bias of the human mind is concerned, it is probable that they are not mistaken. But it would argue an extremely partial and imperfect view of human nature to overlook the fact, that propensities, even though not inherent, may accidentally become habitual and dominant, or to be blind to the degree in which the feeling in question may be generated and pampered by external causes.

Of innovation, for its own sake, I have already allowed that the mind of man is seldom naturally desirous. Nor, even when innovation promises to effect an addition to our present happiness, are those who are already happy much disposed to try experiments. But amid the many calamities to which our earthly condition is liable, as it is natural for the wretched to seek relief, so they are inclined to seek it in attempts which at another time they would have regarded as idle or troublesome, as the sick man turns from side to side on his uneasy bed, and anticipates from every change of posture a lighter and less galling misery. And under the pressure of public and national calamities, however distinct the source of those calamities may be from any civil or religious institution, yet it almost uniformly happens that, as these institutions take up a great space in the popular eye, and as, of all the circumstances by which we are surrounded, these are they which seem most capable

of alteration, the anger of the sufferers is, in the first instance, directed against their rulers or their laws; and, instead of attempting to remedy the real cause of the distemper, or of acquiescing with patience in a distemper which can be remedied by Providence alone, they overturn one system after another, in failure of their producing that perfect happiness which no political system can produce; till, wearied with often choosing, and always meeting with disappointment, men renounce the power of choice at once and for ever, and conclude the wild race of anarchy with the iron sleep of military despotism. It is not, then, against the reason but against the passion of mankind, not against the even and regular current of their disposition, but against that disposition when lashed into fury by the storms of adversity, that we would uphold this vampire of honest and useful prejudice, which presumes that what *is* is right till something better can be found, which throws the burthen of proof on the proposers of innovation, and demands a very plain evidence of necessity and a very strong probability of success before we proceed to throw down, in the prospect of raising a new and untried shelter, those roofs and towers which so well defended our ancestors in the hour of danger.

Nor, when we thus introduce the mention of our ancestors, is it necessary to suppose that we ascribe any unreasonable sanctity to their characters, or any wisdom more than human to their decisions. We only maintain that which we are fully justified

in maintaining, that the institutions which they have left us have stood the test both of their experience and the experience of intervening ages; that, supposing them to have had the same natural abilities, the same natural prudence with their descendants, we must suppose that their institutions were, in the first instance, intended to produce some expected good, or to remedy some known evil; and that of their wisdom we have a right to entertain at least as good an opinion as of those ingenious persons who propose a departure from their decisions.

Nor, when so much is said of the world having gained in experience, can I omit observing that we shall adopt a very unphilosophical mode of speaking, if we talk of the present generation as if it were really in possession of all the accumulated precedents of former ages, or as if we could be really so much wiser than our ancestors as we are later in succession than they. They are the exact sciences alone which are capable of this progressive and endless improvement. The moral and political wisdom of mankind are restrained within far narrower limits; and their leading wants and interests are, in every generation, so nearly the same, that more is, in such points, to be expected from the experience of age and practical intercourse with the world, than from any knowledge which books can supply, even if, which is by no means the case, the study of history inclined men to a fondness for untried theories.

If, indeed, we investigate a little more closely the nature of those feelings which usually operate to make men fond of innovation, we shall find them such as are most unfavourable to calm enquiry, or to that modesty and moderation by which alone the experience of past ages can be brought into action, and on which alone the hope of practical advantage can be founded. The impatience of personal distress, the malignity of suppressed ambition, the youthful ardour which looks beyond all obstacles, the vanity which is blind to any consequences beyond a little present notoriety, and the servile spirit which binds every faction to follow in the train of their leader, these are the ordinary enemies against which the supporters of established institutions have to contend. And when we consider how unfavourable such dispositions as these which I have described must be, not only to the happiness of mankind in general, but more immediately to a Christian and sanctified spirit in the individuals who entertain them, we can hardly wonder that the introduction of new customs, or the unnecessary departure from ancient customs, are severely stigmatized in the oracles of Him who is the God of order and harmony.

Nor must it be supposed that, in thus pleading for established institutions as a general principle, I am pleading on the side of slavery, or in opposition to whatever moderate and necessary innovations may be required in every fabric of human construction, from the lapse of ages or the violence of

previous innovators. The caution with which I would deprecate unnecessary change will apply to the governors as well as to the governed, to the encroachment of power as well as to the impatience of popular feeling. The innovating ruler is at once more foolish and more wicked than the innovating demagogue; more foolish, inasmuch as he risks more; more wicked, inasmuch as more is confided to him. And the prejudiced advocate of ancient abuse, and the pertinacious enemy of obvious and easy improvement should remember, that the true friend of an establishment is not he who conceals, but he who seeks to remedy its imperfections; and that to cause the ruin of a fabric, no way is so certain as to refuse our consent to timely and practicable repairs.

But we have a right to demand that such imperfections should not be fancied where they do not exist, nor exaggerated when they are really found, by the malignity of popular invective, or by an appeal to popular passion. We have a right to demand that the good and evil of a system should be impartially weighed; that more should not be altered than necessity requires, or than may be done with safety; and that the time at which, and the persons by whom, the alteration is proposed should both be considered with anxious vigilance before we admit of tampering with that in which the happiness of thousands is so deeply interested. And as, by the confession of all sides, unnecessary innovation is a great and serious evil, we are justified

in maintaining, as a general principle to which, before they actually arise, it is by no means necessary to suppose exceptions, that whatever is established has, at least, a *prima facie* claim to our support and reverence, and that the citizens of a Christian nation will be ordinarily slow to alter their ancient laws and form of government; remembering the prophet Jeremiah's reproof of those who forsake their old ways for new; the blessing which the same prophet pronounced on the Rechabites for an adherence to the customs of their forefathers, and the emphatic caution of the prophet Solomon, "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change[1]."

Yet one observation more, and I have done. If the Rechabites were thus blessed for the reverence which they showed to the institutions of a mortal lawgiver; if to the customs and forms of human origin, to the dictates of earthly wisdom, or to the accidental results of time and circumstance; if to these so much of sanctity belongs, how much holier the obligation, how much greater the blessedness of a sincere and hearty obedience to those rules of conduct which have been given by God Himself, those words of life and salvation which at the first began to be spoken by His Son, the Holy Ghost through all the prophets bearing witness thereto from the beginning? This was the primary use

[1] Prov. xxiv. 21.

which God Himself made of the customs of the Rechabites, this the especial and immediate end for which He urged their example on the Jews; and I should ill discharge the duty of my profession if I suffered you to depart from this holy place without earnestly and faithfully entreating you to lay to your consciences, that in this respect also it may well become you to adhere to the institutions of your ancestors, and to follow their piety towards God as well as their allegiance towards the king, and their reverence for the laws of their country. In this most loyal county, and to an audience whose hereditary recollections, whose hereditary influence, whose ancient and honest prejudices are all on the side of the laws, I may have, perhaps, exposed myself to the charge of giving needless counsel, when I have pleaded the cause of ancient institutions. But let those who partake in this honest zeal for the continuance of our paternal inheritance of freedom and security, remember that, unless the laws of God are reverenced, those of man cannot long preserve their weight, and that it is in vain for the higher ranks to expect reverence from those beneath them, if their own conduct displays a habitual disregard of the duties of religion. It is a strange and aweful responsibility which, in the complicated machine of society, belongs to those men who are placed (as every magistrate is placed, and as is the case with every man of landed property and hereditary influence) in the situation of chiefs among their people, and as points of imitation

and attention to a large surrounding circle. It is from their households, that the neighbouring village takes its tone; it is from their apparent reverence for God, from the attention bestowed by them on the duties of their station and the welfare of those beneath them, that their servants, their tenantry, and the poor are chiefly guided to an opinion, favourable or otherwise, of the laws under which they live, and the authorities which they are called on to reverence; and, if such men desire the perpetuity of the English constitution, it behoves them to recollect that *they* are its best supporters who sedulously perform the part (a very distinguished and important part) which that constitution assigns them.

But why should I thus confine myself to secular and temporary motives in enforcing that line of conduct which a more aweful consideration renders necessary? The institutions of man, the best and wisest institutions, must at length fade away beneath the breath of time, or be crushed by the hand of violence. The dying prayer of Sarpi was but a fruitless and presumptuous aspiration, and the fall of our own beloved country, as of his wealthy Venice, must one day prove the vanity of the patriot's "Esto perpetua."

But the hour must come, and to many of us is fast approaching, when even the fate of our country will be a secondary consideration to us all, and when the rank which each has held in it will be of infinitely little importance, except so far as each

may be enabled to render with gladness an account of his own conduct before that tribunal of which the occasion on which we are now assembled, is a dim and imperfect shadow.

Let it not, for God's sake, for our soul's sake, and as our everlasting happiness is dear to us, let it not be said in that day that we have been zealous for the commandments of men, and have omitted the weightier considerations of a more pure and holy Lawgiver. Let us not leave occasion to the Judge of Heaven and earth to complain that the idle customs of society, the indifferent regulations of human polity, have obtained from us that respect which we did not afford to the holy laws, the reasonable service of our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier. "The statutes of Omri are kept, the words of Jonadab the son of Rechab are performed, notwithstanding I, saith the Lord, have spoken unto you but ye hearkened not unto me[1]!"

May He who hath framed us, forgive our former provocations; and that we may hereafter find delight in His word; and render obedience to His commandments, may He govern and guide our hearts with the sanctifying graces of His Holy Spirit, through the merits of that blessed Son, who was Himself, as man, the perfect pattern of obedience and holiness!

[1] Micah vi. 16. Jerem. xxxv. 14.

SERMON XV.

ON THE SHIPWRECK OF ST. PAUL.

[Preached at Lincoln's Inn, 1822, and at Madras, 12th March, 1826.]

Acts xxvii. 23, 24.

There stood by me this night, the Angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not Paul, thou must be brought before Cæsar, and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

These words are taken from one of the most remarkable passages in the life of the Apostle of the Gentiles, of which the incidents are as interesting as the doctrine which depends on them is important. A vessel bound from Crete to Italy in the stormy season of the year, and crowded with soldiers and passengers to the number of two hundred and seventy-six persons, had been tossed for many days on the bosom of a tempestuous sea, without the guidance of sun or stars, without tackling to direct her course, and almost a helpless wreck on the water. "All hope that we should be saved," we are told by one who was himself a passenger, "all hope that we should be saved was then taken away[1]." But there was on board that ship an aged and a holy man, a prisoner carried in chains to Rome, whither he had appealed for judgement

[1] Ver. 20.

from the envy of his countrymen. The same, while they were yet in harbour, had warned the crew of their approaching danger, and intreated them to defer till a calmer month, their ill-timed and unfortunate voyage. But now that the evil which he then foresaw had really fallen on them, he again came forward, not to reproach their former unbelief, or to join with them in vain lamentations for a calamity which could not then be avoided, but, like that fabled meteor which the superstition of the heathen world had made the mariner's idol, he came forward to revive their hopes and stimulate their exertions, by the assurance that their lives were secure. Gently reminding them of his having foretold this calamity, that the truth of his former prediction might conciliate their attention and belief to that which he now delivered; "I exhort you," saith he, "to be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night, the Angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not Paul, thou must be brought before Cæsar, and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

The remainder of the history may be briefly related. They believed his words, they followed his directions, and though their vessel was dashed to pieces on the rocky shores of Melita, every soul on board was rescued from the devouring waves.

Among the many considerations which this history suggests to the mind, considerations of reverence for the mercy and the power of that God whose paths are in the sea, and who thus, by the preservation of many lives, was pleased to glorify His chosen servant in the presence of the heathen, there is one, which, if not so obvious as the rest, is at least, of equal practical utility; the benefits, I mean, which holiness bestows not only on the children of God themselves, but on all who are even incidentally connected with them. It is not Lot alone who is rescued from the devoted city; his daughters, his wife, his sons-in-law have all, for his sake, the same merciful offer of deliverance. It is not Joseph only who becomes a prosperous man, and with whose daily toil the Lord is present to bless and prosper it; his Egyptian master finds his goods increased for the sake of his Hebrew bondman. It is not Elijah only who is miraculously nourished during the famine; his Sidonian hostess also has her barrel of meal and her cruize of oil prolonged, and herself and her child preserved from perishing. It is not St. Paul alone, the chosen vessel of the Lord, and the appointed ambassador of the truth to the shores of the western ocean; it is not St. Paul alone, nor his comrades St. Luke and Timothy, nor the courteous centurion, whose discerning kindness to his prisoner might have operated as some little claim to snatch him from the general calamity; the selfish mariners and the brutal soldiery are moreover given by God to the

prayers and services of His apostle; two hundred three score and fifteen persons are preserved from death by the presence of a single captive; and the vain-glorious boast of the Roman, *Cæsarem vehis*, was realized in the instance of St. Paul.

So closely united, indeed, and linked together are mankind, both in their welfare and in their suffering, that a great deliverance can hardly, in the common course of things, be wrought for one individual without his fellows also partaking in it. Not even the hand of an angel could eradicate the tares of this world without injuring the wheat which grows among them; and the wheat, according to the common dispensation of God's mercy, cannot receive its needful nourishment of dews and sunshine without an equal share in those advantages being accorded to the weed and the bramble. But, though even this acknowledged truth would be sufficient to prove the advantages which the righteous man confers on all in his immediate vicinity, yet does the history now under consideration afford a case far stronger than that of an incidental share in a general benefit. The protection here extended, was more abundant, by far, than was necessary for the preservation, or even the prosperity of the apostle. St. Paul might have been saved, though all the crew besides had been left to the mercy of the elements, and as the preservation of the latter was thus (according to the literal meaning of the word χαρίζεσθαι) gratuitous, so was the Divine interposition by so much the

more conspicuous in proportion to the number of persons saved, and the helpless condition of, probably, the greater part of them.

It would have been, in like manner, extremely possible to have given Joseph favour in his master's eyes without blessing that master's store with a providential increase and prosperity; and the ravens might have still continued to bring food to Elijah while the widow of Zarephath had baked her last cake and died.

On the whole, then, it is fair to conclude, from the uniformity which is apparent in these several dispensations of Providence, and from the obvious tendency of, by far, the greater number, that in cases of this kind something more is intended than the mere preservation or even comfort of the one favoured person; and that, as a pious example is of such value to the world, God is pleased by His blessing and protection even in earthly affairs, to add weight and influence to His children, by making them, in a conspicuous manner, His instruments for good to all around them; by rendering their society and neighbourhood a source of safety as well as of honour; and all those who touch, if the allusion may be allowed, though it were but the hem of their garment, partakers of transmitted blessing.

And this will be strongly confirmed if we observe that the contrary is also strictly true; and that God by frequently punishing not only the wicked themselves, but those who are connected

with them, appears to stamp that connexion with danger as well as with infamy, and to draw, by the severest judgements, a line of demarcation between His children and the perilous and contagious society of sin. It is thus that the children of God, if they "dwell in the infected tents of Kedar," if they fly for shelter like Johanan and his followers, into the cities of Egypt[1], are often themselves involved in the snare which was laid for another, and reap in their own ruin the bitter fruits of their companions' wickedness. What sorrows did Lot endure, righteous as he was himself, from his choice of an accursed neighbourhood; what bitter reason had he to lament the hour which beheld him first as a sojourner among the men of the plain, when he was carried with them into captivity by the Assyrians, or when he hardly escaped from their final destruction with the death of half his family, and the deep corruption of its surviving members. When Ahaziah joined himself with Joram, and Jehoshaphat became the ally of Ahab, how surely did the sins of the wicked king endanger or destroy his misguided, though less guilty companion, and how dreadful was the presence of Jonah, the fugitive from God, which brought down the storms of Heaven on the vessel and mariners who received him[2]. Nor is this all; the sins of the fathers are said in the second commandment to be visited by

[1] Psalm cxx. 5. Jer. xliii. 7.

[2] Gen. xiv. 12. 2 Kings ix. 21—27. 2 Chron. xx. 37. Jonah i.

God on the children; and the sins of the prince were in a conspicuous manner visited on the nation whom he governed, when David was moved by Satan to give command for the numbering of Israel [1].

That God is unrighteous in such terrible displays of His power will hardly, I think, be pretended by those who consider that, as examples to the rest of mankind, such punishments have an obvious tendency to answer the purposes of mercy; that as all are sinners, there is no one who can plead that the punishment which overtakes him is undeserved, though it may be that such punishment would not have overtaken him, unless the wisdom of the Most High had been peculiarly called on by the sins of his more guilty connexions; that, lastly, the Allwise and Almighty may so distinguish in His fiercest judgements, as that, while the cup of His anger is drunk by all concerned, its dregs may be reserved as the peculiar portion of the principal offender. Where the connexion with a wicked person is voluntary and presumptuous, that connexion is, indeed, in itself a sin, and deserving of a share in his punishment; but in every case and in every imaginable progressive shade of general guilt or innocence, we may well trust to God that His ways in this state of probation are no less righteous than they will be hereafter in a future and retributive life; that, though the mysteries of His Providence are impenetrable by mortal eyes, His truth shall be

1 Chron. xxi. 1.

made plain, in His good time, to our faith and gratitude; and that though "clouds and darkness are" at present "round about Him," yet "righteousness and judgement are the habitation of His throne for ever[1]."

Nor can it be maintained with reason that these aweful dispensations were confined to the peculiar case of that people, which the Almighty distinguished as His own by an almost visible administration of their government, and by a distribution, in the present life, of those rewards and punishments which are ordinarily reserved for a future state of existence. For, though it is certain that the views of a Christian are not limited to temporal recompences, and that we have no reason to anticipate an exact distribution of happiness or misery in the present life, according to our good or evil deportment, yet is it by no means true that the dispensation of temporal rewards or punishments was at any time confined to the tribes of Israel, or that since the Mosaic covenant passed away, such a dispensation has been altogether abandoned by the Almighty. The calamities of Sodom, of Tyre, of Nineveh, of Egypt, of Babylon, were as strictly judicial as those with which God visited Jerusalem or Samaria; even under the Gospel a sentence of extermination hangs over those religionists who resort to the temporal sword; the oppressions of Antichrist are (if the words of prophecy be at all intelligible) to be punished even in this world with

[1] Psalm xcvii. 2.

signal plagues and misery; and to individuals, diseases and death have been, we know from the testimony of an apostle, the righteous chastisement of a profanation of the Eucharist[1].

And though it be, doubtless, an impious presumption in our present state of ignorance to decide what instances of public or private calamity either are or are not judicial, it is certain that the universal feeling and universal experience of mankind have borne witness to the fact that, even in this world, there is retribution, and that the arm of God has been, in certain instances, made bare against conspicuous acts of impiety, or bloodshed, or oppression. Nor, when we add to these more rare and aweful dispensations those usual and familiar cases in which poverty, disease, and shame, are stationed in the gate of indulgence, to deter with their pallid aspect the unwary from entering in, and to execute some portion of God's righteous vengeance on those who have braved His terrors, can we avoid acknowledging that godliness is great riches, as well in this life as in the life to come; and that the path of the wicked is even here beset with snares, and his cup a cup of trembling. But, if the power of God be thus actively employed in the temporal punishment of His enemies, it is also certain that it is not with the Jews alone that this punishment has been so ordained as to include others besides the offender. In the instances which

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 30.

I have already named, it cannot be said that those persons who lived before the law was given were dealt with in conformity to any peculiar provision of the law, and the same doctrine is notoriously applied to the children of God after the cessation of the Mosaic covenant in those several prophecies of the New Testament, where the worshippers of God are exhorted to fly from Jerusalem and Babylon, lest, by tarrying, they become partakers in their plagues[1].

But even in private life, and in the occurrences of every day, how often do we behold the consequences of sin extending to all who have the misfortune to be connected with the offender. I do not mean that ships are lost because they have an atheist on board, or that a roof is rendered unsafe to the fellow-lodgers of the impious; but in those dispensations which we call natural, though to a Christian they are no less providential than the most aweful wonders of Almighty power, how many families are made miserable by the consequences of a father's vice; how many friends lament their careless intimacy with the ungodly; and how constantly does experience enforce the admonition of Moses, "Depart I pray you from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins[2]."

No less sure, though perhaps less observed, is the beneficial effect extending from the religious

[1] Rev. xviii. 4. [2] Numb. xvi. 26.

man to his friends, his children, and his neighbourhood. That we less frequently behold these favourable interpositions of Providence than those by which the associates of the wicked are chastized or consumed, may be ascribed both to the greater scarcity of real holiness in the world, and, still more, to the circumstance that the mercies and blessings of Providence, as they are more abundantly given, are, therefore, less noticed than His aweful and exemplary exhibitions of justice. But, if that secret machinery by which He guides the world were disclosed, and those springs laid bare which, however small in themselves, supply the most important uses, and contribute, far more than rare and remarkable occurrences, to the well-being of the world and its inhabitants; how many families might we find made prosperous and happy by the virtues of one among their number; how much of health and strength and peace of mind derived from such single fountains; or (if our views were still farther enlarged to the concerns of larger societies,) how often should we, perhaps, behold the fruitfulness of the earth increased, and the existence of nations continued by the secret prayers and undiscovered influence of those good men, who, though the world hath overlooked them, are beheld by God with pleasure; who, like Job, are examples of His grace to other worlds, and, like Elias, allowed to intercede for the continuance of His blessings to their own!

There is a striking legend in the Koran, that the

Lord delayed to bring the waters of the flood over the world, till Methuselah was gathered in peace to his fathers; but, to leave such fables, we know from the Lord's own authority, that the sorrows of the latter days are to be shortened by Him "for the elect's sake whom He hath chosen[1]." And can there be a stronger inducement to endeavour so to rule our hearts before God as that our lives and prayers may please Him, than the persuasion that by acting thus we shall not only serve ourselves, but our family, our friends, our neighbours, perhaps our country? Or can the sinner have a greater aggravation of his criminality or his misery, than the recollection of how many may be condemned on his account, to mourn; how much of wretchedness his crimes may entail on those whom he most tenderly loves, or how the addition of those crimes to the weight of the common guilt may accelerate the ruin of his people? Were not the sins of Achan and the accursed treasure in his tent, sufficient to turn back in flight the thousands of Israel[2]? And who is there who shall pronounce with confidence that the mischief of his offences shall terminate with himself, or that they may not be, in this world, in a terrible manner required at the hands of others?

Or, secondly, can we be too cautious what intimacies we form, and with whom, since we find such important results follow from a good or evil choice

[1] Mark xiii. 20. [2] Joshua vii. 11, 12.

of friends? For, is it not most extraordinary, that while every other circumstance is attended to in our connexions with mankind, while temper and understanding are essential requisites in a friend; while the trader will not unite himself with a partner or correspondent of whose circumstances or diligence he is not well informed, the Christian will not scruple to form the closest ties with those whose characters he must know, if he enquires into them at all, are dangerous to themselves and all around them? Yet surely such connexions are naturally best adapted for the comfort and happiness of either party, in which not only temper and understanding, but principles jointly accord, in which the associates may not only take sweet counsel together, but walk to the house of God in company? "Be ye not unequally yoked together with 'unbelievers[1]," is a caution of which the prudence is evident; and between unbelief explicit and implied, between the profession of impious principle and the habitual practice of such actions as put our better principles to shame, the difference is so small that it is hardly worth discussing.

Nor are such connexions only likely to disappoint us from those circumstances of dissension and dispute, to which a disparity of principles may be reasonably expected to give occasion. They are, in themselves and in the first instance, for the most part, deficient in the necessary warmth and earn-

[1] 2 Cor. vi. 14.

estness. The good-will of the wicked must want that living spark of love which alone is really superior to chance or change, which grieves for our faults without despising us; which helps our misfortunes without insulting us; which bears our infirmities without flattering us; which hopeth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things. Other bonds may be convenient; they may be agreeable; they may for a time be strong; but their strength is like those Arabian brooks which are rivers now, and now thorny valleys. "What time they wax warm they vanish; when it is hot they are consumed out of their place. The troops of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them; they were confounded because they had hoped; they came thither, and were ashamed[1]." But, further, if we suppose such connexions as I have spoken of to be maintained in this world with mutual and unaltered affection, yet how dreadful is the prospect which they hold out of parting in a few years for ever. When those in whom our soul delighteth are hidden from our sight in the grave; when those eyes are closed which have rested on us with affection, and that hand is stiffened and grown cold which was wont to answer kindly to our pressure, though we are not without hope, a sure and certain hope, of rejoining them to part no more, we are by our present loss compelled, like our Divine Master at the grave of Lazarus, to shed

[1] Job vi. 17. 19, 20.

tears of natural sorrow. But when to this misery of parting at all, the fear is superadded that our parting may be eternal, and that those whom we have loved are condemned to everlasting fire, how intense and intolerable is our agony! And, surely, if there be any grief which is allowed to linger with the souls of just men made perfect; if any tear still hangs on their eyes, it must be when they vainly seek in Heaven for those friends with whom they have sojourned below, or behold them, in the day of judgement, among the multitude on the left hand!

But, fourthly, it is not only on account of our vicious friends themselves that we may, perhaps, have cause to mourn. So perilous is the bad example of those whom we love and reverence, that we are fortunate indeed, more fortunate than we have any reason to anticipate, if we do not ourselves receive infection. I do not mean that we are of necessity to fall into those more conspicuous vices which, even in a friend, disgust and alarm us. This may be, indeed, and will be far oftener the case with us than we are apt to flatter ourselves; but this is not our only, nor, perhaps, our principal danger. For, though our practice be less openly offensive to God and good men than theirs, it is certain that, by associating with them, we lend to their vices the additional influence of our own more decent example; while every excess which we countenance by our presence, and every licentious expression at which we smile, are adding to the weight

of that account which we must one day yield to God, and treasuring up sorrow and fear against the hour of death and the day of judgement. "Be not deceived," is the language of reason as well as of revelation; "evil communications corrupt good manners[1];" and next to maintaining a good example ourselves, there is no caution more sacred or more necessary than that we should also choose our friends and companions from those whose example is good.

I know it will be answered that this is not always in our power; that our situation in life, the similarity of studies, the equality of years, the recollections of youth, the ties of blood, the circumstances of neighbourhood, for the most part determine our acquaintance for us; and so far as mere acquaintance reaches, the observation is strictly true. But though it is allowed by St. Paul that, so long as we live in the world, we must frequently form acquaintance with irreligious characters, and though the Scriptures by no means require us to go out of the world to avoid them, yet between this necessary intercourse, and friendship or, even, familiarity, the distinction is great indeed. And, in general, if we ourselves are of a conversation consistently blameless and holy, we shall find the irreligious of their own accord sufficiently disposed to shun our society, or, if they really take pleasure in our company, it will be a sign, and a very hopeful one,

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 33.

that their characters are by proper means reclaimable.

But while we shun all intimacy with those whose contact, we fear, may defile us, it is a matter of religious prudence no less than of rational enjoyment, to supply the place of worldly and dangerous friendships by drawing nearer to those of whom the lives and examples are likely to benefit us, who may supply by their stronger prayers the weakness and unworthiness of our own; whose spirits, like guardian angels, may plead our cause, and watch over our safety, and whose society, as it has been on earth our protection, may be a portion of our reward in Heaven.

And, wherever our intimacies are already formed, whether among the enemies or the friends of God, it is a duty which we owe to them, to our Maker, and to ourselves, to employ our best endeavours to correct whatever is amiss in their principles or conduct, and to confirm and strengthen them in the paths which lead to salvation. For this purpose a double watch should be kept over the doors of our lips, lest we ourselves say any thing, or assent to any thing said by others which may encourage them in sin, or slacken their exertions in the cause of God and goodness. I do not mean to recommend an affected solemnity of manner, or that, when we are ourselves converted, we should give our intimates occasion to suspect that we have cast off all affection for them. On the contrary, we have an additional reason for avoiding all pe-

culiarities which may make religion offensive or ridiculous, and for being more anxious than ever, by kindness, by courtesy, by compliance in things lawful or indifferent, and by postponing, where we safely may, our pleasures and tastes to theirs, to prove to them that our love is not changed but sublimed and purified, and that religion is so far from chilling the natural affections that it must needs, when sincere, make men better kindred, and better neighbours, and better friends. But in the mean time we should not for a moment lose sight of the truth, that there is nothing by which our influence over the minds of others is so much weakened as by inconsistency and irresolution; that to cast *ourselves* away can be to our erring friends no possible advantage; and that, whether they repent or perish, it behoves *us*, at least, to escape with our lives and not to look behind us. And to maintain our friendships in this wise and happy temperament, I know no better course than that of devoting them to God by the diligent practice of what is, in itself, the most essential duty of a friend, a frequent intercession in the behalf of our friends at the throne of grace and mercy. Nor can we, as I conceive, be seriously impressed with either the value of a friend, or the powerful efficacy of prayer to preserve that friend to our love and draw down on him the blessing of our common Father, without sometimes recollecting his name in those moments when our hearts are most warmed by their nearer approach to the source of all love and ho-

liness, and uniting an earnest wish for his salvation to those entreaties which we offer for our own.

We have, indeed, no reason for hoping that our tardy devotions can open the gates of Heaven for a sinner whose day of grace is faded into darkness, and who has gone to his account in unbelief and final impenitence; but of those who yet live, it is hard to decide who have absolutely "sinned unto death," and we are still less able to determine how often the devotions of the faithful have obtained for those, whose case was most to be despaired of, a fresh and efficacious visit from the Spirit of Grace and Comfort, and a little further respite to recover their strength before they departed hence and were no more seen.

It was a memorable saying of Ambrose to the mother of Augustin, when she lamented to him the indisposition which her son at that time displayed to all religious feeling: "I have never known the son allowed to perish for whose soul so many prayers and holy tears interceded." Nor when we hear, in like manner, complaints from parents and teachers, of education of example and of entreaty thrown away on the levity and stubbornness of those whose hearts they have desired to soften and ameliorate, can we avoid sometimes suspecting that their pains might have had a happier effect if His help had been duly sought for who only giveth the increase either to the earthly or spiritual husbandman.

Nor need we fear that, while thus interceding

for our brethren, we shall presume too far on the mercy and patience of God, or that we shall neglect our own interests while we are earnest on behalf of others. To the intercession which I recommend we are induced by those numerous passages of Scripture which not only encourage but command us to offer prayers, as for all men generally, so especially for those to whom we most owe love and reverence. To such an intercession we are encouraged by the successful example of those worthies of ancient time whose devotions could snatch men from shipwreck, from disease, from death, and from sin; and who had power, by their supplications, to change the course of nature, and to bring rain and fruitfulness on those lands which the sins of the inhabitants had rendered barren. To such an intercession we are emboldened, above all, by that example which we are in all things at humble distance bound to follow, the example of Him who came down on earth that His blameless obedience might withdraw the curse from His creation, and who, even now, at His Father's right hand, is occupied as the advocate of His brethren! And be sure that all they who in their secret thoughts display such real anxiety for the happiness of their fellow-creatures, have an intercessor in Christ who will never cease to care for them; that "with the same measure which they employ it shall be measured to them again," and that the mercy and the spiritual help which they implore God to grant to their neighbours shall be with a

larger and more bounteous hand, returned into their own bosoms[1]!

It is the duty then, or, to speak more properly, it is the blessed and glorious privilege of every Christian to be busied in prayer for all whom he loves or pities. But, while we thus call down on their heads all temporal and spiritual benefits, and while we pray for ourselves that our example may be such as to become, through God's grace, the source to them of blessing and salvation, let us always conclude with the request that, however strong our earthly regards may be, they may never overpower the love which we owe to our God, our Maker, and Redeemer!

He is, after all, the great and only Friend on whose love, under all possible circumstances, our hope may surely rely; whom no slander can deceive, no vain resentment sever from us; whose favours are abundant beyond our boldest desires, and who, when most justly offended, is more ready to forgive than we to ask forgiveness. The time must shortly arrive when all earthly friendships will become less than nothing in comparison with His favour; and when we shall find, if we have not ourselves cast it away, that "no height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord[2]."

When we are tossed by the storms which our

[1] Matt. vii. 2. [2] Romans viii. 39.

rown rashness has incurred, He is near at hand, like the Apostle, to support and strengthen us. If we follow His directions, He gives us the means and assurance of safety, and His mighty intercession can rescue His miserable creatures from a gulph of destruction more dreadful than that deep which yawned beneath the Cretan mariners!

To Him, therefore, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all obedience shown, and all praise and glory given, now and for ever!

SERMON XVI.

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818; at Lincoln's Inn, 1822; and at Madras, 1826.]

PHIL. i. 21.

To die is gain.

To cure mankind of the fear of death is what the wisest men of the ancient world have, according to the different degrees of their imperfect knowledge, in various ways attempted to accomplish. It is among the principal and most blessed effects which (according to the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews,) were to follow from the humiliation of God's Son to our mortal nature[1]; and how truly and perfectly it was produced in the case of St. Paul, is apparent from the text I have chosen. As, then, the value of the cure may be appreciated from the eagerness with which it has been sought, and its possibility demonstrated from the example of those who have attained it, it may be useful and interesting to enquire how much had been effected

[1] Heb. ii. 15.

towards this great end by unassisted reason or ancient tradition; what further aids the religion of Christ supplies; what men those are whom Christianity encourages to look forward with hope beyond the grave; in what manner that hope may best be kindled and kept alive in us, and in what manner it may be expressed most fitly.

I have said that to subdue the fear of death was the favourite object of heathen wisdom, and the point to which the sages of the ancient world most earnestly directed their labours. There have been some, indeed, both in ancient and modern times, who, instead of suggesting considerations whereby death, before it came, might be contemplated with less of horrour, and, when it came, endured more easily, have been content to advise us to avoid the subject as much as possible; to shift the melancholy scene whenever it came in view, and to drive from our thoughts, by considerations of an opposite tendency, an event which, come when it may, is beyond our controul and remedy.

But those persons have been greatly ignorant of the temper of the human mind and the constitution of things around them, who did not recollect with what a strange and mechanical impulse the soul reverts the most to those ideas from which she is most anxious to escape, or who did not perceive that all nature is too closely filled with hints of our mortality to suffer the melancholy truth to fade away from our remembrance. Should we admit the possibility of effacing from the mind by

pleasure, or by business, the traces of what we are, and whither our journey leads us, yet the recollection is sure to return when this fever of the spirits has subsided, and to return with greater strength, and dressed in more dismal colours. We cannot study, we cannot feast, we cannot dance always; and the blithest and the busiest of us all will have enough of time in his hours of sickness or inactivity to mourn over the shortness of his earthly day, and to tremble at the darkness which is to follow. But this is not all. For, the idea of death having once possessed the soul, it is by no means so easily expelled as these miserable comforters imagine. It will sometimes follow us into the midst of the densest crowd, and mingle its hideous aspect with whatever pictures of ambition, or of indulgence, our most active fancy can assemble; it will make our cup bitter; it will strew our bed with thorns, and whisper to us in the midst of our mirth with a voice of most dismal moaning.

> " Linquenda tellus et domus et placens
> Uxor, neque harum, quas colis, arborum,
> Te, præter invisas cupressus,
> Ulla brevem dominum sequetur[1] !

This truth is confessed by the tenour of those very counsels by which the votaries of vice and luxury have enticed us to acquiesce in such pleasures as they were able to supply, and to shut our eyes against

[1] Hor. Od. II. xiv. 21.

their approaching termination. Why else are we so repeatedly exhorted to "talk not of fate but to talk of odours and wine;" to "pry not into the Babylonian computations," to "recollect that the main evil of death lies in its apprehension?" Why is this very shortness of life so continually insisted on as an argument that we should "eat and drink while life remains to us," unless the mirth of the voluptuary is, indeed, mingled with heaviness, and is, perhaps, therefore chiefly valued by him as a contrast with the gloom which nature presents on every side, and which throws its shadow over every circumstance of his present pursuits or pleasures? There is no need of the suspended sword of Damocles to scare him in his hours of merriment, while the roses which wither on his brow, and the cries of the mourners in the streets, and the familiar faces which pass away from around his table, all teach him that the hopes of earth are nothing else than vanity, and that "there is no counsel, nor device, nor wisdom in the grave whither he goeth."

Since, then, to lose the thought of death is impossible, it only remains to make that thought, by some means, less intolerable. And this has been attempted through many different suggestions, of which the greater part have only served to show the weakness and inconsistency of those by whom they were brought forward. Some have attempted to support us under this last visitation of our mortal nature by reminding us that it is, in our case,

no more than all the rest of the world have suffered or must suffer; that Scipio, and Cæsar, and Alexander have passed to the same silent dwelling; that "Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead[1]," and that it, therefore, ill becomes us to repine that death should be our portion also. "Ad hanc legem natus es: hoc patri tuo accidit, hoc matri, hoc majoribus, hoc omnibus ante te, hoc omnibus post te. Quantus te populus moriturorum sequetur, quantus comitabitur[2]!"

But this is a mere jargon, and "multiplying of words without knowledge," by which, though the voice of complaint may have been often awed into silence, as, indeed, it is by this sole principle of the resistless force of fate, and the utter inutility of resistance, that the inhabitants of India go down to the grave with so much external composure, yet the inward bitterness of death never was and never will be alleviated. If I am to lose a limb to-morrow, I shall not feel less pain in the operation because my neighbour has, some years since, had the same performed on him; nor is death at all the less misfortune, so far as I am concerned, because it is a calamity to which all others are also liable.

Those heathen writers suppose themselves to have succeeded better, who endeavoured to fortify us against the fear of death by representing death as privation only; as a long sleep without a dream;

[1] St. John x. 53. [2] Senec. Epis. lxxvii.

the end of all our hopes, and fears, and feelings. "That," said Epicurus, "which when present is nothing, is no cause of affliction when anticipated." "Death, which is to other men the greatest of evils; and the most terrible, is to us nothing; inasmuch as, when we exist, death is not, and where death is, we exist not. Death, therefore, is literally nothing, since, where death is, there is nobody[1]."

It is strange how much the followers of the school of atheism appear to have prided themselves on this foolish quibble, but it is stranger still to find, in modern times, and with lights so infinitely superior, some writers speaking of annihilation as an event of absolute indifference. For, first, this very description of death (if it were indeed true, that death were a total and eternal cessation of thought and feeling) is so far from being a comfortable or tolerable prospect, that it is one opposed to all the instincts of our nature, and which the generality of mankind, even of those who possess least in this present world, regard with the utmost horrour. The possessor of little is seldom, on that account, less attached to what is in his possession. There are, comparatively, few so wretched in this present life as not to prefer existence in their actual state to not existing at all; and still fewer are there, who do not, so long as they live, entertain some memory of past or some expectation of future happiness, which,

[1] Diog. Laertius Vit. Philos. x. Cic. Tusc. Quest. i.

vain as the first may seem, and delusive as the second may be found, are not to be without a pang abandoned entirely and for ever. We know the declaration of the philosophic Mæcenas, who professed to prefer to death a life of all imaginable misery[1], and to such a lover of existence it is a wretched encouragement indeed, to console him under his loss by an assurance that the loss will be total. But this is not the worst, for it is plain that the knowledge that we ourselves are mortal is not the only, perhaps not the principal way in which our lives are embittered by the recollection of mortality. Man is not made to be alone; he is unable, through the constitution of his nature, to separate his own well being from the being of those with whom he is linked in the bands of kindred or affection; and he who has felt the agony of even a temporary separation of those ties, may appreciate, in some degree, the sufferings of the epicurean whose brother or whose child was gone down without hope to the tomb, and was hid, as he supposed, from his eyes for ever!

No more, indeed, is necessary than to read the complaints of impatient grief which Quintilian has left behind him, to be sensible how vainly such philosophy boasted of triumphing over the terrours of the grave, when, in truth, they had done no more than cover it with blacker darkness, and when

[1] "Debilem facito manu, debilem pede, coxâ; lubricos quate dentes, vita dum superest, bene est; hanc mihi, vel acutam, si das, sustineo crucem."—Senec. Epist. ci.

even they who themselves disbelieved in a life to come, could not refrain from pronouncing those barbarians "happy in their errour," who regarded death as the passage to another state of existence[1]. Let us see, then, how these more fortunate reasoners of paganism had succeeded in establishing the faith of a life after death, and how far this faith, as held by them, was calculated to rob death of its sting.

They began by reasoning justly, that, as we are composed of two distinct natures, we have no reason to suspect that the accidents to which the one is liable have any necessary tendency to affect the other. They observed that the soul can do many things (such as reasoning, comparing, compounding, and remembering) without the body's help; and concluded that the soul might continue to do all this, though the body were returned to its original element. They even went farther, and suggested the possibility that she might, under such circumstances, exercise these powers in still greater perfection than, from the presence and pressure of the body, she is now permitted to do. And as reason told them that whatever now is, must continue to be till destroyed, so till some agent were found competent to destroy the soul, the soul (they were induced to apprehend) might exist for ever in a separate state of happiness or of misery, or might be united, at the pleasure of their gods, to a successive series of bodies. And this opinion they

[1] Felices errore suo, &c.

conceived to be remarkably strengthened and supported both by the usual phenomena of dreams, and by the supposed fact that the manes of the dead had, on certain occasions, been seen and heard by the living; a notion which, whether true or false, has been common in all ages and countries, and which the epicureans themselves were so far from regarding as unfounded, that they had recourse to the wildest theories to reconcile it with their own opinions[1]. But when this possibility, or call it if you will, this probability, was admitted by the minds of men, and it is plain that this is, pretty nearly, the utmost length to which the unassisted powers of human reason could proceed, the result obtained was, surely, far from sufficient to support the trembling spirit in its passage through the valley of the shadow of death, or to chase from the gate of the grave the horrours which surround it.

The first hypothesis of a separate and spiritual existence of the soul, when deprived of those hopes and aspirations which gild the Christian Paradise, resolves itself into little more than a continued but useless consciousness of existence, a continued, and, it may be, a murmuring recollection of the pains and pleasures of a life which is to return no more, the obscure residence, the stridulous cry, the shadowy limbs, and shivering appetite for warm blood, which, in the estimate of Homer, made up the comfortless elysium of departed heroes[2]. The

[1] Plato Phædo. Cicero Tusc. Quæst. I. &c.

[2] Odys. xi. xxiv.

second, which Lucan considered the more comfortable creed of those warlike Gothic tribes who had derived this faith with many other circumstances of belief and practice from their ancestors in the north of India, held out to the dying man no more than a return to the miseries of life and death in another body. And, as the interruption of consciousness was almost a necessary accompaniment of transmigration, it was, in fact, nothing else than to say, that while his present being was absolutely drawing to a close, another being, of which he was to have no knowledge, and in which he could feel no interest, was to arise from his essence, like a plant from the seed of its predecessor. Or, though the hope might be indulged, that where all was unknown, some better things were in store for the virtuous, such a chance of possible gain would but little avail to comfort us under the present and certain loss of life and friendship and enjoyment!

It is true, nevertheless, that the majority of the heathen world, and more especially, perhaps, among those who were least entangled in the meshes of philosophy, both had and have some better expectations than these, derived from those traditions which had descended from the earliest men from the times when our species conversed with angels and with God, and learned from the highest authority the secrets of that unseen world, to which the visible world is but a passage and a vestibule. And how much more satisfactory these traditions were to the mind than the hardiest and most plau-

sible conjectures of natural reason, may be inferred from the eagerness with which Socrates is said to have recurred to them in that hour when the soul of man is most anxious in her search for comfort. How gladly does that wise and good man take refuge from the difficulties of abstract reasoning in those ancient legends (of the word μυθος in its primitive application, our "fable" is too harsh a rendering) in those legends of Egyptian and Chaldean mystics, which speak of the soul as expiating her crimes in the waves of Phlegethon, or enjoying the reward of her virtues in the society of departed sages. And surely it may be said that whoever reads the Phædo with attention, will not hesitate to admit that faith is an instinct natural to man, or refuse to bless that wisdom and goodness which have supplied this appetite, since the truths of Christianity were made known, with a food so pure, so inexhaustible, so satisfactory!

But though much of truth and much more of striking poetry may be found, beyond a doubt, in the heathen traditions of a life beyond the grave, the misfortune was that these traditions came down to the civilised nations of antiquity in a state so encumbered with fable, where truth and falsehood were so intimately blended, and where the falsehood was of a kind so repugnant to reason and probability, that it was difficult, if not absolutely impossible, to determine what circumstances, if any circumstances at all, might be selected and adhered to from the mass of general errour. The Grecian

judges of the dead, the river, the dog, and the ferryman of hell, are notions which the principal heathen writers hardly ever mention without scorn. And, unhappily, though their scorn was in these instances justly excited, yet, when these were taken away, very little remained on which the faith of a dying man might fasten, except the general probability that the soul did not perish with the body, and that the separation of the two would be the commencement of a new and distinct existence to the former. But, when thus much was believed, and this, as we have seen, was nearly all of which the best instructed heathen was persuaded, the idea of death must still have been extremely formidable, nor to be contemplated without an anxiety which the wisest and boldest of their number were little able to overcome or dissemble.

The man who felt the approach of death was departing for a strange and distant country, where his reception might depend on causes over which he had no controul, where all was dark, where all was eternal, and where all was, therefore, terrible. "Poor fluttering lively spirit," said the philosopher Hadrian, on his death, "poor guest and comrade of the body! to what unknown regions wilt thou wing thy way, pale, naked, and trembling?"— "Whether to live or die be most profitable," were the words of a far better and wiser man than the Roman Emperor; "whether my lot, oh men of Athens, be in this respect better than yours, there

is no one who knoweth, save God[1]." But how different were the dismal anxiety of Hadrian, and the doubtful hope of Socrates, from the sure and certain faith of that great apostle, to whom "to die was gain," and who exclaimed in triumphant anticipation of his approaching martyrdom, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day[2]."

One nation, indeed, there was of the world anterior to the Gospel, who had received or retained, by whatever means and from whatever antiquity, the doctrine of a future life and a most righteous judgement after death, undebased by those preposterous superstitions which encumbered the belief and disgusted the common sense of the more enlightened heathen enquirers. That, already, in the days of our Lord on earth, the great majority of the Israelites entertained these expectations, is a fact apparent to the most careless reader of the New Testament. And though the well known paradox of that mighty mind[3], whose wildest speculations are not to be treated with levity, has countenanced the opinion that this faith was, among the Jews, of more recent introduction than the time of Moses; yet there are at present few points more generally agreed on by learned men, that, even from the ear-

[1] Socrates, in Plato's Apology. [2] 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.
[3] Bishop Warburton.

liest days of the law and the patriarchs, the doctrine of the Israelites was, in this respect, the same with our own, and that they acknowledged no less than the Christian Church, that death was but the beginning of another life, and that after death came judgement.

Still, however, there were some circumstances in their situation which prevented this truth from producing to its full extent that blessed effect on the minds of the house of Israel, which, after his conversion to Christianity, the apostle of the Gentiles experienced, and of which he speaks, in the words of the text, as of privileges not belonging to himself alone, but as the common heritage of all those who bear the name of Christian.

What those circumstances were, and in what manner the Gospel has delivered us from their might, I must reserve to a future sermon. But in the mean time it is my duty most earnestly to call on you to consider that the greater and more glorious the lights and the privileges of the Gospel, the more intense the danger from which it sets us free, and the disquietude the more painful, the greater is our obligation, and the necessity the stronger to avail ourselves of the deliverance held out by God's own hand, and in our lives no less than with our lips to manifest our fervent gratitude. Simply to live for ever is a privilege of a very doubtful character; it is a privilege which the spiritual enemies of the Almighty have retained in their wildest defection from His rule, and it is a

privilege which the Monarch of all may continue or decree in His wrath as well as in His mercy. But to be happily and gloriously immortal is a blessing which, if the Gospel be true, the Son of God has purchased for us by His blood; it is a blessing which His bounty has set within the reach of every one of us; by Him the tree of life has again been planted in the world, and it remains for each of us to determine whether its fruit is worth our gathering. But let us hasten to make our option, for the shades of evening are waxing long, and the hours of exertion are melting fast into twilight. To die is the lot of all men, but let us so live that to die may be our gain and our immortality!

SERMON XVII.

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, May 3, 1818; Lincoln's Inn, May 5, 1822; and Madras, Feb. 26, 1826.]

PHIL. i. 21.

To die is gain.

IN my late sermon on this text it was my endeavour to explain the causes which made, to the great majority of the heathen world, the expectation of death a source of almost unmingled disquietude and pain; and I shortly noticed, also, that the Jews, though trained under a holier law, and embued with a more excellent erudition; though taught from the lessons of their fathers, and the implied but sufficient testimony of their ancient and divine oracles, to crown the temples of their deceased friends with flowers in honour of the garden of Eden, and to bless, in their service for the dead, that God who kept their bones unbroken till the hour of resurrection; that the Jews, in spite of all the presumptions and traditions which they could plead for a life beyond the grave, were not enabled to derive from those traditions a hope so sure, so

certain, and so full of blessedness as that which St. Paul experienced, and which the humblest Christian, if he be not wanting to himself, may experience through Jesus Christ our Lord! And the inferiority of their hope to ours may appear from the following considerations.

It was, in the first place, less absolutely certain and undeniable. It was, indeed, the hereditary belief of their tribes since the time of those patriarchs who had fallen asleep in hope, and who, by the testimony which they bore to themselves that they were pilgrims in the present world, evinced that they expected to find a better and more enduring home hereafter. It was implied in very many striking passages of Scripture, as where Job declares his hope of seeing God after worms had destroyed his body, and where God Himself, the God of the living, laid claim to the faith and homage of those who had long since fallen asleep in the tomb of Macpelah.

But the revelation was implied, not explicit; the doctrine was disputed, in its essential circumstances, by the majority of the nations around them, and it was denied circumstantially and altogether by a clamourous and powerful party among themselves. And when we compare, in practice and on subjects where the mind is little disposed to acquiesce in uncertainties, the effect produced on ourselves by a speculative and impugned theory in comparison with that fulness of faith which follows an authentic experiment, we may be well convinced that

the actual return of the Son of God from the grave has done more, by itself, to prove the immortality of our nature, than all the law, and all the prophets, and all the traditions of the fathers from Abraham down to Gamaliel, had effected for the confirmation of the house of Judah.

But this was by no means the only circumstance of disquietude. For, secondly, the faith of the orthodox Jew consisted, as we have seen, not only in the persuasion that his soul was immortal, and that his body should revive, but in the expectation of a most just judgement after death, in which the eternal condition of men was to be decided according to their works done in the body. But, though this hope would have been, indeed, a heavenly comfort under the terrours of the grave, could they have been sure that their own lives were such as God approves, and that, in the integrity of their hearts, they might pass boldly before His judgement-seat, yet would a restless conscience seldom fail to whisper to the dying man that his actions had been far other than well-pleasing to his Judge, and that the power, the justice, the purity of that Judge were to him nothing else than so many additional arguments of dismay and danger. The same God, he could not help remembering, who hath promised to "keep mercy for thousands" beyond their deserts, hath declared, on the other hand, that He will "by no means clear the guilty[1];" and that

[1] Exod. xxxiv. 7.

neither the heathen nor the generality of the Jews had any sufficient ground to hope that their imperfect obedience would, be accepted by God, and introduce them to Elysium or Paradise.

I say they had no sufficient grounds for hope, though I am far from forgetting the expiatory offerings for sin which their law commanded, or the connexion and correspondence which their Divine Lawgiver designed between those offerings of vicarious blood and the Christian truth of the one great atonement. But as the obvious weakness and inefficiency of such sacrifices were sufficient to deter the most sanguine from relying with perfect confidence on the outward ceremony alone, so the event of which that ceremony was the type, and on whose retrospective blessedness its inward grace depended, as being future, was obscure even to the wisest and most enlightened Israelite, and could, therefore, afford no present definite consolation even to those who were, in the fulness of time, to be saved by it.

Nor need we wonder, therefore, at that custom (so strongly expressive of diffidence in themselves and their own exertions) which began at a very early period of the synagogue, of pleading the merits and relying on the intercession of their more favoured or less criminal ancestors; nor that, before this practice arose among them, and in spite of whatever fallacious comfort they might derive from it, the death even of holy men was, under the old dispensation, regarded as a misfortune rather

than a blessing, nor that the dying hopes of the more modern Jew have been mingled with very painful doubt and anxiety.

" Dost thou weep, light of the world? Dost thou tremble, pillar of Israel?" said the disciples of one of their most celebrated rabbins, to their expiring master. " Alas," was his reply, " if I were going before an earthly king, though the worst which he could inflict would be worldly loss or suffering, I should still have cause for fear. And shall I not weep and tremble exceedingly when I am going before the King of kings, who, if He is angry with me, may cast me into the hell of fire, and whose wrath is for ever and ever?"

Since, then, the doctrines of the heathen and the Israelite were alike unavailing to take away the sting from death, and enlighten the countenance of him who was about to descend into darkness, we must arrive at two conclusions. First, that the wants of our nature and our reasonable fears require some better comfort than that religious system of a future state of rewards and punishments to which the religion of nature is limited, and to which some Christian sects would persuade us to limit Christianity. Secondly, that the operation of some such better principle is implied in those hopes which the apostle entertained, and of which he speaks not as belonging to himself alone, but as the common heritage, unless their own negligence intervene, of all those who bear the name of Christians.

It is plain, however, that these hopes must rest on a different foundation than the blameless virtues of their entertainer. Even of St. Paul himself it could not be said that he had, through life, so served God that he had no reason to fear appearing before Him. In his youth that great apostle had been a hinderer and slanderer of the Gospel, and the curse of innocent blood sate heavy on the accomplice in Stephen's murder. True it is that he had repented. True it is that the latter and greater portion of his life had been occupied and expended in the service of his God and his fellow-creatures. But where shall we find in the book of God's word, or on what principle of natural reason or justice can we ground the expectation that any services, however great, can be offered as an atonement for acts of an opposite character, or as overbalancing in an account between man and his Maker, the scale of man's transgressions?

If, indeed, the laws of God, so far as they respect our conduct, were, as in the instance of our first parents, a series of prohibitions only, if no actions were commanded us to *do*, and if the whole law could be kept by leaving certain actions *undone*; if this, which is, to a great extent, the case with every human code, were the case with the whole duty of man, as revealed to us by reason and by Scripture; if God had not commanded us to relieve the poor; if He had not commanded us to praise Him or pray to Him, or if He had set down a limit to our duty in these

particulars so definite as to be distinguished by each of us, and so low as to be surpassed by our more earnest endeavours, it might then, indeed, be urged, "If I have done some things which were displeasing to Thee, I have done others which Thou delightest to behold!" There might be, then, a merit in one part of our lives, which might atone for a demerit elsewhere, and our obedience beyond what was commanded might carry us to Heaven, in spite of a certain proportion of those faults against which the severest edge of God's anger is sharpened.

It is thus that we ourselves, when we allow the zeal and activity of one under our authority to induce us to pardon certain instances of misconduct, shall always find that this activity and zeal has been something more than the mere bond and letter of his duty. For doing simply what we ordered, we neither praise nor pardon him; but it is because he has done something more, or done it in a better or more diligent manner than we expected or absolutely required of him.

But, where God and man are concerned, the latter must, even in his best endeavours, be an unprofitable servant, not only because there is no one virtuous or pious action which is not commanded, but because, in all these actions, the law of holiness is too perfect and sublime to be even attained, much less transcended by our best exertions. For every active duty, no less than every species of abstinence, a necessity is laid on us, a necessity

enforced by the most aweful threats, and woe to us if we fall short of the service which God requires at our hands! Thus if a man plead, "It is true that I have dishonoured God's name, but according to my means I have done good to my fellow-creatures. It is true that I have been secretly avaricious or intemperate, but by the decencies of my outward conduct I have set a good example to all around me;" the answer might be, "Therefore thou shalt be punished as a blasphemer only, *not* as having been *also* uncharitable. Therefore, when thy selfish and sensual habits have consigned thee to the place of torment, those flames shall not be superadded which the openly impious shall experience!" I do not deny, what is plain from many passages of Scripture, that the good deeds of the Christian which spring from faith, are mercifully accepted as offerings well pleasing to the Most High, and are the means, and the only means, whereby we treasure up to ourselves, through Christ, an exceeding weight of future glory. But we cannot too steadily bear in mind that (considered by themselves, and according to the principles of natural religion) what we call good deeds are only so many instances in which we have not done evil, and that they can, therefore, by themselves have no possible efficacy in removing God's wrath from those actions in which we have positively offended Him.

"But the mercy of God," it may be urged, "may incline the scale on the side of Heaven, and

instead of being extreme to mark what is done amiss, may pass lightly over our provocations." Alas! even our knowledge of God's mercy, if abstractedly considered and placed, as we have hitherto professed to place it, on the basis of natural religion, is by no means sufficient to relieve us from the intolerable dread of death and judgement! God may, indeed, and God will (our natural religion is able to teach us this), God will make His mercy to triumph over His justice, and dispense even to the worst of His creatures, a cup of wrath far milder than their offences call for. But God's justice is, no less than His mercy, an essential attribute of His nature, and though the last may triumph over the other, it cannot extinguish it, or destroy that anger against sin which is a necessary perfection of the All-righteous. He may judge us mercifully; He may condemn us mercifully; and yet we may be judged, and yet we may be condemned; and that condemnation (though tempered, doubtless, by every fitting forbearance), *must* still be enough to confirm the menaces of Him who cannot lie, and whose threats against sin, in their least and mildest acceptation, cannot be heard or read or recollected without great fear and trembling. As God is merciful, He will deal as gently with His creatures as the order of His creation, and the dignity of His laws will admit of: but as God is true, He will condemn to unquenchable fire all them that set at nought His authority: and as God is the equal judge of angels and of men, He will not clear the guilt of these last,

lest the elder and worthier creatures should tax Him with a partial sentence!

"But the sinner may, with true contrition, repent him of the evil which he hath done, and cast himself with bitter tears on the fatherly kindness of his God!" Great, indeed, and blessed are the power and comfort of that repentance whereby a Christian is brought to the mercy-seat of Christ, and to that expiation which the poor in spirit are taught to look for in His name! But who shall tell us, who could tell the heathen, and on what grounds does the follower of natural religion believe, that repentance, considered by itself, though it may doubtless prevent our swelling the load of our guilt, can operate to atone for sins past, and to the discharge of debts already contracted? Do we find in common life that the natural consequences of bye-gone actions can be remedied by after sorrow? Can we pay a debt the more easily because we regret our extravagance? If a man flings himself from a tower, can he arrest his fall by changing his mind half way? It is true that, in earthly courts of justice, not only the general good character of a criminal, but his apparent contrition and sorrow are, in some cases, fitly allowed to plead in his favour. But there are two grounds on which they are thus admitted among men, neither of which, so far as we are informed, can apply to the judgements of the Almighty.

First. Here it is only for a first offence, or an offence, at least, which has not been often repeated,

that the contrition of the culprit is ordinarily allowed to plead. But the sinner who trembles before the tribunal of God is not so favourably situated, inasmuch as it is no single act, no rare recurrence of transgression which will then be laid to his charge, and for which he must in that dreadful day make answer. The sins of a whole life, the backslidings of many years, resolutions often broken, temptations presumptuously sought after, opportunities of serving God presumptuously neglected, the world and its forbidden pleasures pursued with systematic greediness, the promises of Heaven rejected with systematic indifference or aversion: a picture like this is what the life of the worldly man too generally offers; and do we hope that a few tears for the folly of our choice will release us from a choice made against due warning, and persisted in with a perfect knowledge of the consequences? Nor is this the only difference; for, Secondly, an earthly court of justice is, in its essence and spirit, correctional far more than penal. It is the duty of the ruler to reclaim, if possible, the offender, before he proceeds to make his exemplary destruction an instrument of good to others. "Tollere nocentem" is the last resort of the law; "meliorem reddere" either is or ought to be its first endeavour. When, therefore, a criminal is to be sentenced, it may, under certain circumstances, be most fitting to suffer his tears to plead in his behalf, and to allow him a chance of repairing his past offence by a diligent discharge of all his future duties. But the

last great sentence of God in the day of His wrath, so far as that is made known to us, is not for the amendment but the exemplary chastisement of the sinner. It may admonish others in the higher ranks of creation, but, so far as its immediate object is concerned, it is penal, and penal only. All the corrective dispensations of God will have been already, and in this preceding life, expended. In this life He will have already borne long with us, and warned and chastened us; in this life a sufficient term of probation will have been given to every man, and, the time being past in which a change of conduct might have been accepted, we have no good reason to believe that in the grave there can be pardon!

"But the repentance of which we speak may have already, in this life, taken place; the sinner may have already forsaken his evil ways, and have so profited by the corrective discipline of God as that His final vengeance may be unnecessary." And, surely, if a man could render such an account of even his latter years as that they should show no stain of guilt, and that no single instance should occur in which, by broken vows, and violated principles, and repeated relapses, he had mocked the patience of the Lord, it may be that such a one might lay down his head in hope, rejoicing that he had effected a timely peace with his Maker. But what is this to us, whose lives have been a tissue of unsteady service to God, and irresolute rebellion against Him; whose hearts, even in their holiest moods, have been divided be-

tween Him and His enemies; whose prayers have been stained with sin, and whose very repentance has been to be repented of? Such a repentance as we can offer, the Christian, like the rest of the world, believes indeed to be absolutely necessary to salvation; but something more than repentance is necessary, both in the eyes of Christianity and of natural reason, to make our repentance itself availing with our Judge as a cause or a condition of pardon! What is, then, this necessary something? What else shall we find, what more shall we look for, what else or what more was desired or expected by St. Paul, than that expiation for sin which the ancients sought for in those blood offerings which were shadows of things to come, but which the Christian recognizes in the sacrifice and meritorious sufferings of Him whose death hath paid the penalty of fallen nature; whose abundance hath made up for our innumerable defects, and whose sinless virtue hath sanctified our imperfect penitence?

To men bought with a ransom so precious; to men protected by such an Intercessor; to men thus more than reconciled with God, identified with His nature, and adopted by Him; to men thus circumstanced, what is there in death which can be accounted terrible? Is it terrible to exchange a world of temptation and frailty for that quiet resting place where the wicked one ceases from troubling, and where the struggles which rend our mortal bosoms shall be at peace for evermore? Is it terrible to leave the violence or weak-

ness of mankind for the society of angels and just men made perfect, and the vision of our glorified Lord? Is it terrible to forsake a world of toil and penury to pluck the fruit of the tree of life, and to rest from our labours in the green shades of Paradise [1]; or does not the time seem long which must pass before we shall "stand in our lot at the end of the days [2]," and crowned with gold, and with triumphal branches in our hands, bear our part in that great Hallelujah wherein the angels shall exult to join?

There are those, indeed, among men to whom death is, even now, most terrible! He is terrible to those who, with so great and gracious encouragement to repentance, have preferred to remain in the prison house of their sins rather than to seek, by the appointed means, the glorious liberty of God's children! He is terrible to those who have contented themselves with an idle and fruitless recognition of Christ's power, without an attempt or a desire to show forth their gratitude in their lives; who have cried, "Lord, Lord," without giving themselves up to His service; who have rested on the letter of His promises, without attending to their spirit, and have boasted themselves the chosen of the Lord,

[1] Quas neque concutiunt venti, nec nubila nimbis
Adspergunt, neque nix acri concreta pruinâ
Cana cadens violat, semper sine nubibus æther
Integer, et large diffuso lumine ridet?
Lucretius, iii. 19.

[2] Dan. xii. 13.

forgetting by what means their election was to be rendered sure. He is terrible, lastly, to those who have leaned on the broken reed of human merit, or repentance; who, with the brightness of the Sun of Righteousness before them, have turned back to the twilight of natural religion; who, professing to look forward to a future life without end, have acquiesced in grounds of hope, than which the Jew possessed far better, and by which the heathen, in his grossest ignorance, was still too wise to be comforted! But to the sincere and humble believer in the atonement made by Christ, to him whose faith has worked by love, and who has earnestly panted after holiness; who has sought for grace in the ordinances of the Most High, and shown forth the grace received by a progressive though imperfect amendment, to him death is not terrible; he rests on a protection which no created thing can render vain, and the garment, which is his passport to the marriage banquet of the Son, is itself a pledge of that Son's free grace and favour.

Of the many direct, and the still more numerous implied assertions of Christ's atonement, which are contained in Scripture, the time forbids me to take notice. It is enough for my present purpose to have shown that this doctrine is not only consistent with, but absolutely necessary to, the fears and feelings of our nature, and that, consequently, those sects by whom it is explained away into I know not what apparatus of allegory and mysticism, are but

little entitled to the name which they assume of rational and philosophical Christians.

I cannot, however, dismiss my audience without entreating them to recollect that this illustrious display of God's mercy in the humiliation and sacrifice of His Son; these glorious promises which He has made, and this earnest of future blessedness and perfection which He has afforded us in the gift of His Holy Spirit, are not merely a splendid pageant in which we are not personally and individually concerned: nor are they to act in our favour like a charm, without our own application of them to ourselves, and our earnest and consistent use of the means of safety which they offer.

"To die is gain;" but it is gain to them only to whom it has been "Christ to live;" and by how much the greater salvation has been tendered, and by how much the easier the terms have been on which it was tendered, so much the blacker confusion must our faces one day gather, if our obstinacy in sin has abused the long-suffering of the Lord, and we have presumed on the merits of His blood to disgrace the name of His religion! Those are ill taught in the language of Scripture who suppose that salvation is not offered to us, but forced on us; who forget that they are the children of God who only are heirs with Christ of a happy immortality; and that the promise is not that we shall be made the sons of God, but that "power shall be given us" to become so [1].

[1] St. John i. 12.

Let then the promises of the Most High produce in our minds the effect for which they were intended; the effect of encouraging and exciting us to a holy energy in His cause, and to a soldierly perseverance in our spiritual warfare. But let us recollect, in this our struggle, that the arms with which we fight are not our own; that our most acceptable services are clogged with sin, and our firmest allegiance tainted with defection; and that in our seeming strength, as well as in our greatest weakness, our reliance can there only be grounded whither the natural fears and gracious aspirations of the heart alike mount up for refuge, the cross of that victorious Saviour who hath tamed the strength of sin, and made the gate of death the entrance to immortality!

SERMON XVIII.

THE ATONEMENT.

[Preached before the University of Oxford, 1818, and at Cuddalore, 1826.]

ROMANS vi. 3, 4.

Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

ST. PAUL in these words, and in the chapter from which they are taken, is providing against an abuse which (even in the earliest and golden age of Christianity) some mistaken Christians had begun to engraft on its doctrines, and which had been urged, with some show of plausibility, as an objection to those doctrines, by the enemies of the new religion. He had in the preceding chapter explained, in a clear and striking manner, the general fact on which are grounded the most important peculiarities of our creed; that our justification is not purchased by any virtues or merits of our own, but that it is the free gift of the Most High, through Jesus Christ His Son. And he had illustrated the greatness of

the mercy which God, for His Son's sake, had shown to the world, by comparing it with the degree of severity which, for Adam's sake, the same God had formerly thought fit to exercise towards us. "The sentence," St. Paul had argued, "which, in the case of Adam, was passed for one man's sin on the race of mankind in general, was no more, after all, than (even if such a sentence had not been passed in the first instance) the subsequent crimes of each of Adam's descendants might in his own person have justly called for. But, in the case of Christ, a benefit was conferred on the whole race of mankind for the sake of one Man's obedience, to which the whole race of mankind were so far from having any meritorious claim, that all men and every man had been committing actions which merited the direct contrary. So that though death, in point of fact, reigned over the world in consequence of Adam's sin, not in consequence of your sin or of mine, yet were the sins of each of us and of each of Adam's descendants so great as to have called down such a sentence on our heads, if that sentence had not been previously passed on us; while, on the other hand, the gift of eternal life, which is offered to us all in consequence of Christ's merits, is offered, not merely without regard to the deserts of each particular man, but absolutely in spite of them. "Where sin" then "abounded, grace did much more abound." The mercy of God was more powerful to save us from death than our offences were to seal and confirm the doom of death

which had been passed against us; and not only the natural liability to death which we inherited from our first parents, but those additional claims which death had acquired on us in consequence of our personal transgressions, were cancelled and done away "through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." Here, however, it was, that the abuse of which I have spoken occurred, as well as the objection which, in consequence of that abuse, was advanced against the Christian doctrine.

"If," it was argued, "the blessing of everlasting life is offered to us through Christ, not only without regard to our merits, but actually in spite of our sins, what necessity, what obligation have we to be virtuous? If, do what good works we may, we can do nothing to merit Heaven, then, verily, we shall have purified our hearts in vain, and vainly washed our hands in innocency! If, do what sins we please, the blood of Christ and the grace which He has purchased for us are sufficient to render us acceptable in the sight of God, why then do we deny ourselves those pleasures to which our nature is inclined; why crush those passions which gnaw, like the Spartan fox, the bosom which confines them, but of which the wildest and most profligate indulgence is atoned for by the common Saviour of all? Does not, according to St. Paul's own statement, the greatness of our undeserving enhance the splendour of the mercy shown us? Let us, then, give this glory to the Most High! By making ourselves

more vile, let us render His condescension the more wonderful! Let us sin that grace may abound!"

It is hard, indeed, to believe that tenets so contrary to the tenour and temper of the Gospel of Christ, so repugnant to the common sense of mankind, and to all the reasonable fears and instinctive feelings of our better nature, can ever have been, seriously and in simplicity, taught or believed by even the weakest and worst instructed Christian. However some good men, through an indiscreet devotion to one single part of the Christian scheme, have been led to dwell too long and too exclusively on the promises and privileges of the Gospel, to the neglect of its menaces and duties; however, through an erroneous estimation of the nature of Divine Grace, and the manner in which that grace is accorded to us, they have unhappily weakened the motives of moral exertion; I can hardly conceive that there has ever been a conscientious follower of Christ who, knowingly and systematically, has upheld the doctrine of antinomianism. To such doctrines the sermon of Christ on the mount, His every discourse, His every action, His every miracle, no less than every page in the remaining works of His earliest friends and followers, are too decidedly hostile to admit of discussion or hesitation. And, with some necessary allowance for the warmth and bitterness of controversy, and for that habit, in which controversialists have too much indulged, of imputing to an antagonist, as articles of faith or practice, those odious consequences which

that antagonist disclaims, we have, thank God, no evidence before us of any numerous Christian sect who have not maintained the necessity of holiness, either as a concurrent cause, or, at least, as an unfailing preliminary to our final salvation through Christ Jesus.

There were, notwithstanding, in the lifetime of the apostles, and there still may be found, two different descriptions of men who thus, to their own ruin, and the shipwreck of many souls besides their own, pervert the meaning of the Gospel. The first are a base and sensual tribe who, having sold themselves to work iniquity with greediness, are glad to catch, like drowning men, at straws and shadows, and to avail themselves of any pretence, how weak and futile soever, to justify or excuse their continuance in practices of which their own consciences, and the written word of God, and the natural religion of mankind bear witness that "the end of such things is death." It is something, for a person thus unhappily circumstanced, to conceal for a moment and by the merest sophistry from his own eyes the ruin to which he is tending. It is something to escape the indignant pity of his fellow-creatures, by making others believe that he is satisfied with his own prospects, and consistent with his own principles, while, in truth, his morning thoughts are all of trouble and dismay, and his nightly dreams are foretastes of torments. It is something I fear, too often, of fiendish gratification to draw others into the same pit from which he is himself

unable to return; by his pernicious reasonings to serve the cause to which he has devoted his life, and to comfort himself over his own destruction by multiplying, like Pharaoh in Ezekiel[1], the amount of his associates in misery. It was thus that antinomianism appears to have first manifested itself among the early gnostics and in the licentious Church of Corinth, and it is hence, I am persuaded, that it will be generally found to spring wherever it occurs among the outward professors of Christianity.

The second, however, and as I conceive by far the larger party, is made up of those who perceive, as plainly as we ourselves can perceive, the absurdity and wickedness of such a system, who are fully sensible that the All Holy God is of purer eyes than with pleasure to behold iniquity; and that the All Just and All Wise can never be supposed to sanction the breach of those laws which He has written in the hearts of His rational creatures; which He has developed in every page of the inspired and authentic records of His will; which He has enforced by so tremendous threats and by such an aweful display of wonder and miracle. But this very impiety and absurdity they make the ground-work of a charge, either against Christianity in general, or against the particular doctrine of Christ's atonement, while they contend that a tenet on which such consequences are chargeable cannot possibly have proceeded from God.

It is to this effect that Celsus has compared the

[1] Ezek. xxxii. 31.

moral qualifications required from the candidates for admission to the heathen mysteries, with the gracious invitations held out in the Gospel to the most wretched and atrocious sinners; and it has to this effect, also, been urged by a freethinker of the last century, that "if Christ be the propitiation for all sin, the most wicked Christian is secure, inasmuch as God cannot in justice lay claim to any further satisfaction for his offences[1]."

And certainly, if no way could be found to escape from such a conclusion; if the doctrine, as it has been stated, stood alone and without explanation in Scripture; if nothing else were contained in the system of Christian belief but absolute and unconditional forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ, and the offer of eternal life without any reference to our virtuous conduct; I, for one, would not hesitate to admit either that the Christian religion did not come from God, or that mankind had not yet succeeded in discovering the purport of some of the most striking and, apparently, some of the clearest passages in the New Testament.

But, God be praised! there is no need to abandon either our common faith or this essential and most comfortable part of it. The abominable consequences to which I have referred belong not to Christianity itself, but to an imperfect and distorted view of it. The doctrine on which they are charged is one part only of a vast chain of which no single

[1] Celsus ap. Orig. l. 3. sect. 59. p. 147. Chubb, Posthumous Works, p. 250. (quoted by Leland.)

link can bear to be separated from its fellows, but of which the links united are the bond of earth and Heaven, the threefold cord of God's wisdom, and justice, and mercy!

It is, accordingly, not as giving up or weakening the doctrine itself, but as bringing forward other doctrines with which it is inseparably connected, that St. Paul repels the force of these objections, and evinces that we may be saved by grace alone, and yet the reason for good works shall not only continue unimpaired, but acquire, from this very doctrine, an additional force and energy. And this he does by an appeal to the terms themselves in which believers lay claim to the promise of Christ, and to the obligations which those terms imply to a future continuance in holiness.

"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid," are his words. "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."—"Knowing this," he proceeds, "that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin." The force and beauty of this argument will appear from a very short examination of its particulars.

It is, in the first place, abundantly certain that (whatever the advantages may be which the merits and death of our Lord have obtained for mankind from His Father) they are the same with those which every Christian both seeks and hopes in an especial manner to obtain in the ceremony of baptism, that form by which he publickly enters into the fellowship of Christ's religion, and solemnly lays claim, according to the solemn promise of his Lord, to all the privileges of Christ's new covenant of grace and pardon. Whatever we seek after in His name, whatever we obtain through His merits, we seek and obtain by a due use of the ordinance of baptism!

But how is it, and under what limitations that we are taught, on that occasion, to seek for and expect the free gifts of pardon and grace? What is the conventional meaning of the ceremony? St. Paul has told us that it is an image of our death and burial; that our immersion, or aspersion (for the import of either is the same) is to signify our interment, or that "jactus pulveris," which in every age and country has been regarded as a virtual interment; insomuch that, the form being complied with, we are said to be born again, and to appear, in the world to which we return, as if we were already inhabitants of another state of existence. "We are buried with Christ by baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

What, then, let me ask, is the effect of that

natural dissolution which is thus conventionally shadowed? Is it not the interruption of all our former appetites? Do the dead hunger or thirst any more? Will beauty move their love? Will the tabret or the harp, the richest wines or the most luxurious viands entice them beyond the bounds of temperance? Load the coffin with gold! clothe the skeleton with scarlet and ermine! Will this awaken his avarice, or will these elevate his pride? Surely, if the soul perceives at all the objects which surround the ruins of her recent dwelling, she perceives them but to recognize their utter vanity, and to feel that these are not the things which can any longer contribute to her happiness!

This comparison of death, indeed, is a known and familiar figure of speech to express insensibility to any particular object. We say that a truculent and inhuman man is dead to natural affection, that an impudent person is dead to shame. Nor can I conceive any form of words or any significant ceremony more powerfully expressive than baptism (when thus explained) will appear, of our renunciation of all those habits and propensities, which, in our former nature, were offensive to God, and of our obligation, thenceforth, to cultivate and to practise those several habits and feelings which belong to a renewed, an amended, a purified, and a spiritual state of existence. It is apparent that, since baptism is, avowedly, not only an act of oblivion on God's part for the past, but (both on God's

part and on ours) a solemn covenant for the future, it is apparent that a neglect of its implied conditions must necessarily involve a forfeiture of its advantages, and that, if we do not, in this life, habitually die to sin, we cannot hope, in the life to come, to awaken to everlasting happiness.

So far, indeed, is St. Paul from preaching faith without works in the common and offensive meaning of the term, that it would be no easy matter to point out in any one of his epistles so many as twenty verses together, without some severe and powerful remonstrance on the danger of sinful indulgences; some earnest exhortation to purity of life, as a proof (the only proof which God will accept) of the new heart and nature of which baptism is the image; and which, if it be not really wrought in us, our ceremonial baptism is worse than vain!

"Still, however," it may be urged "though this may prove the purity of the Christian doctrine, it proves it at the expense of its consistency. When St. Paul has said that grace *alone* is the efficient cause of our justification, he comes in too late with the supplementary clause that personal holiness is *also* necessary. While we magnify grace we detract from the importance of moral duties; while we insist on works, we introduce something else besides grace, as, at least, co-operative in the process of our salvation."

This difficulty has, I believe, had considerable weight with many of those who have, unhappily, rejected the truth of our religion; and it has, also,

been a principal occasion of many of those divisions by which, to the great misfortune of Christianity, the hands of its friends have been enfeebled. To escape from it, the socinian, as the advocate of the moral law, is reduced to explain into metaphor and poetical ornament those striking expressions of Scripture in which the operations of Divine grace are spoken of, and to maintain as a general principle (what is only true of some particular passages in St. Paul's writings) that the works which he so carefully excludes from a share in our justification, are not *good works,* properly so called, but the ceremonial observances of the Jewish law.

But of such an explanation, a reference to the present passage will prove that it is by no means susceptible. The comparison is, in this place, not between the different methods of atoning for sin, but between the sin and its atonement. It is between Adam and Christ, not between Christ and Moses. They are the transgressions of the natural not of the ceremonial law, by which only all the children of mankind can be said to have merited death; and it is plain, therefore, unless St. Paul have expressed himself in a manner extremely at variance with the usual rules of intelligible composition, that he has really denied the efficacy of moral observances as instruments of justification.

Nor is it, on the other hand, sufficient to reply, with the calvinist, that the terms which St. Paul has employed in these different passages, are merely different statements of the same mysterious process

in which man is passive and God alone is merciful and mighty, inasmuch as those whom His free grace has chosen to everlasting life, He, by the same free and sovereign influence, irresistibly disposes to follow the paths of holiness. For, though this will sufficiently account for the virtues of the favoured number, and will prove that without virtue, no person has a right to believe himself the child of God, it can be by no means reconciled with the general tenour of the moral lessons of Scripture; the warnings, the cautions, the threats, and entreaties of the Most High; that the sinner should forsake his way; that the saint should take heed lest he fall; and that the wicked should escape, while yet there is time, the everlasting misery which awaits him! Can God act a part with His creatures? Can He caution those who are in no danger? Can He threaten those whom He never means to punish? Can He offer mercy to those who are morally unable to make use of it? Surely when God speaks, He speaks to those whom it concerns, nor, admitting Him to have mercy on those only whom he pleases, can it be necessary for Him to secure their salvation by the means of delusion and hypocrisy? When God speaks, He speaks to moral agents, and if from such agents He demands good works as an essential preliminary to their final happiness, the difficulty will still return how to reconcile this demand with free grace and unconditional pardon. To solve this difficulty will be my endeavour in the remainder of my sermon.

First, then, though it is evident from Scripture that good works are generally necessary to salvation, it is evident also (let him that heareth understand!) that they are not absolutely or universally so. Our religion knows nothing of a "*limbus infantum*," a neutral ground between Heaven and hell, where they whose exact measure of holiness does not come up to the level of the former are condemned to pass an eternity without suffering and without enjoyment. The child, who has no good works to show; the madman, who cannot be justly made responsible for his evil works; the dying penitent, whose lamp of life sinks down while his repentance has, as yet, reached no farther than his heart, and whose purposes of amendment and restitution are cut off for ever; all these, we trust, may be inheritors, through Christ, of endless happiness, and partake in the benefit of that covenant which they have neglected, or of which they have always remained unconscious. So true is it that, in the case of no inconsiderable portion of mankind, the mercy of God is bestowed without any possible reference to human merit, while yet no imputation lies against His justice or His truth; nor is the necessity weakened (which He has laid on every capable subject) of repentance and of holiness.

But, secondly, though it is certain that in many passages of St. Paul, justification, adoption, and final salvation are employed as convertible terms, inasmuch as they are all constituent parts of one

great benefit, and the last is the natural and (so far as God's share in the transaction goes) the certain consequence of the former, it is plain that the justification of which he had been here speaking (inasmuch as he had spoken of it as already begun in the persons whom he was addressing, and, in the sense of our Church, as the cause, not the consequence of holiness) is distinct, as occurring in this life, from our final acceptance and salvation in the life to come; and is conferred, in fact, in that baptism by whose typical form he illustrates its obligations. It is the same with that regeneration of which baptism is the outward symbol, and which marks out, wherever it occurs (that it ordinarily occurs in baptism I am, for my own part, firmly persuaded), our admission into the number of the children of God, and the heirs of everlasting happiness. It is the commencement of that state of salvation in which, if a man continues, death has no power over him, inasmuch as the grave, which our nature so greatly fears, is to him no extinction of life, but a passage to a life more blessed and more glorious.

Now it is plain that our entrance into this state may be of grace alone, and independent of any exertions of our own, though our continuance in it may, to a certain considerable degree, depend on our own option and our own endeavours. A pardon may be free in the first instance, though it should be forfeited or rendered unavailing afterwards, and, indeed, I need hardly observe that it belongs to the

essence of a pardon to be retrospective only. And that our admission into a state of pardon and of peace is, indeed, in the first instance, of grace alone, and altogether independent of our deservings, is apparent, not only because it is His Providence which has determined those external circumstances by which we have been ourselves conducted to the visible Church of Christ, but it is apparent, moreover, from the act of admission itself, which is not the allegation of any good works but the implied acknowledgment of many evil ones, a confession that we are worthy of death, and a desire that we may die, through Christ, to our previous depraved affections.

And this, by the way, may seem to prove that the ancient and catholic institution of infant baptism is not only countenanced by the known practice of the primitive Church, of the yet elder Synagogue, and the most obvious meaning of some remarkable expressions of our Saviour, but that the objections which have most frequently been raised against it are founded on an ignorance of its meaning, and on a forgetfulness of that utter absence of human merit which adheres to the adult no less than to the infant candidate. Baptism, it should be borne in mind, is, on our part, no more than a prayer (conceived and expressed in that form which Christ Himself has sanctioned) that God would admit, for Christ's sake, the person who partakes of it into the covenant of His salvation. But, as we may certainly pray for others as well as for our-

selves, and for those who are unconscious of our prayers, as for those who are sensible of their import; and for future and secret grace and illumination, as for that which is immediately and perceptibly bestowed, there can be no impropriety, there can be no inconsistency in entreating the Lord, after His own appointed way, to bestow on the infant those blessings in the reception of which both infant and adult are equally passive; and which, even if in the first instance inapplicable, will be too soon and too surely needed when the innate corruption begins to expand, and the warmth of youth to unlock the folds of the sleeping serpent. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days[1];" and he who, with anxious tears, commits the care of his seed to the Most High, may hope at length "to come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him[2]."

Nor, to return from this digression, can it be pretended that the freedom of our original pardon is vitiated by its continuance being made dependant (as in the case of baptism it undoubtedly is) on the performance of certain duties. Those duties, it should be recollected, are not new burdens imposed on us by God on the occasion of our entering into the baptismal covenant. They are no fresh consideration promised to him in consequence of Christ's coming into the world, and of the mercy which He undertakes to show us. They are no more than

[1] Eccles. xi. 1. [2] Psalm cxxvi. 6.

we should have been bound to perform, even had Christ never died for us, in common gratitude for the daily and ordinary blessings of life, and light, and sunshine; in common prudence, as the most effectual means of passing through the present world with comfort and safety; in common fear, as creatures already liable to God's wrath, but desirous to conciliate, by all possible means, the anger of our dreadful Monarch. An immense and additional blessing is bestowed, and no return is stipulated but the continuance of our former service! Surely such a gift is, in the strictest sense of the words, of free grace, though we allow that its final accomplishment is contingent on our good behaviour.

And this may be still further illustrated by the fact, that as we are commanded to do good as well as to abstain from transgression, it is plain that our best works are only so many instances in which we have not done evil, and that every neglect of an active duty is the perpetration of an actual sin against our Maker. But it would be too much to say that any man contributes to an act of grace when, in truth, the highest praise to which he can lay claim is, that he does nothing to cancel that act or prevent its becoming effectual. Yet this is the only manner in which the best actions or the most virtuous lives can be said to forward or secure our salvation; and it follows, that we may be bound, as we most undoubtedly are under the severest penalties, to keep the laws of God, and yet

our salvation may be accorded on grounds entirely distinct from human merit.

But, further, the consistency of grace and duty is also apparent from the manner in which alone we are enabled to discharge the latter. The operation of grace is not confined to our free justification at first and to our merciful acceptance afterwards; the conversion by which we first yield our assent to God's merciful offers (whether this conversion takes place in baptism itself, or when the beneficial effects of baptism are first made perceptible in our spiritual nature), this conversion is, itself, an effect of that Spirit which alone has power to attract our attention to Heavenly things; while, secondly, our perseverance in the calling once received would be impossible to us without help from above; and lastly, it is of God's mercy alone that our perseverance and our services, imperfect as they are, can obtain either reward or pardon.

Our salvation, then, is of grace alone, inasmuch as our first admission into the covenant of peace is without any previous probation of virtue, and, in the case of adult converts, in spite of many previous sins. It is of grace, inasmuch as the services which are afterwards required from us have no aptitude in themselves to call down reward from the Most High; and are, on the other hand, exclusively calculated to promote our own happiness and the happiness of those around us. It is of grace, since to the performance of these very services the strength is furnished from above, by Him who not only calls

on us to hope, but bestows on us the spiritual gifts by which that hope is sealed and perfected. It is of free grace, above all, and as it respects the consummation of our Christian warfare, because we are not only *first* freely called and *afterwards* freely strengthened to perform the obligations of our calling; but, even where we have neglected and transgressed our duty, the repentance and the faith which were, at first, our only passports to Christianity, are still suffered to attend us and plead for us, and by the same merits of the Redeemer through which we were justified and sanctified, we are accepted at length and glorified.

It is true that the grace thus given is not (so far as I can discern in the word of truth) in any instance described as irresistible. We may refuse to be converted; we may resist the sanctifying discipline of the Holy Ghost; we may turn back in our Christian course, and render vain, and worse than vain, our Christian privileges; but a gift is not the less a gift because the object of our benevolence may refuse to avail himself of it: and He who has bestowed on us "the power of becoming the sons of God," (I quote the very terms in which St. John describes the nature of the Christian dispensation,) may be asserted, in the utmost strictness and propriety of language, to be the efficient and only meritorious cause of our adoption, our sanctification, and our final glory.

Our justification, then, whether past or future, whether in this world or in the world to come, our

justification is of God; but it is for ourselves to determine whether we will seek for and secure it by the means which God has appointed. And to satisfy ourselves that we are thus securing it, that we are really such in our practice as in our principles we profess to be, and that, believing on Christ, we, with our whole hearts, follow after the blessing which He has brought for us, I know no better course than a frequent mental recurrence to the ceremony and engagements of our baptism, a frequent and unflinching comparison of our lives with the obligations which that ceremony laid on us.

Are we really so far able to resist the allurements of vice as that, if not constantly, we are, at least, habitually above their influence? Are we really, in the general tenour of our lives, living to God, and in contradiction to that corrupt and fleshly principle which our friends in our baptism besought the Almighty to subdue in us? Then are we dead to sin when we no longer feel any pleasure in it; then, though our emancipation may not yet be perfect, and though in our regenerate nature some earthly frailties may be found (as even the disembodied spirit was supposed in platonic mythology to linger for a time round the place of its body's sepulchre), yet if these taints are in spite of ourselves; if these returns to earth are waxing shorter and less frequent; if our sanctification, though imperfect, is progressive; and if, though the bodily tabernacle still weighs us down, our heart and our hope are in Heaven, then may we rejoice with a godly joy in

Him who hath thus far helped us: ascribing to His grace the advances which we have made, and imploring Him to bring to an end the good work which He hath begun within us!

But if otherwise, blame not those friends who prayed for your infancy; blame not that ordinance of God which was, in itself, most powerful to sanctify and to save; blame not the Holy Spirit of God, who, even now, as He hath promised, is warring in your hearts to deliver you; but, blame your own heedlessness, blame your own self-flattery, blame your own obstinacy and hardness in sin, on which these prayers, this baptism, this inward and purifying grace have so long been thrown away! Consider how terrible must their prospect be who (having been replaced by the free mercy of God in the same immortality which Adam forfeited) prefer a continuance in the corruptions of their mortal nature, to that easy service of the Most High, to which He lovingly invites and enables them. And fly, while there yet is time, to the altar and to the grace of the Redeemer, to renew your broken vows, to reclaim your forfeited privileges, and to recommence in His might that spiritual life of holiness, which death cannot interrupt, nor the gates of the grave imprison; but which shall bear us on "from strength to strength," and through successive stages of obedience improved, of faith confirmed, of hope yet nearer and brighter, to that undying happiness whither He hath led

the way, who is the guide of our path, the chief of our warfare, the pattern of our lives, the champion of our salvation, our hope, our strength, our crown, and our exceeding great reward!

SERMON XIX.

THE ATONEMENT.

[Preached at Lincoln's Inn, May, 1823.]

COLOSS. iii. 3.

Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

THE image conveyed in these words seems to have been a favourite one with St. Paul; he frequently compares the condition and habits of a Christian to the state of those spirits who have shaken off the chains of mortality; who have left behind them, in their coffins, the desires and anxieties of the world, and are now expecting, in the residence of departed souls, the return of their Lord, and their own resurrection into glory. This illustration is remarkably calculated to reconcile the privileges with the duties of a Christian; to establish our salvation through Christ alone, while it preserves inviolate our obligations to personal holiness, to exclude our boasting, and to stimulate and encourage our diligence.

But the use which I now intend to make of this fertile topic is to extract from it still further illustrations of the leading peculiarities of our religion,

and more particularly of that which is its corner-stone and master-key, the vicarious and expiatory nature of the Christian sacrifice.

And, in pursuance of this design, I shall examine, first, in what sense we may most reasonably understand those expressions which thus speak of living men as if they were deceased already; secondly, what peculiar advantage this fictitious and figurative death can communicate to those of whom it is predicated; thirdly, what manner of persons those are who are said to partake in the death of Christ; and, lastly, what moral and practical consequences may be further derived from a comparison which is, with St. Paul, so frequent and so favourite.

In the first place, then, it will hardly have escaped your notice that the death which, in all these passages, is predicated of persons yet alive, is predicated of them as a consequence and concomitant effect of the death and sufferings of the Messiah. We are dead in Him, that is, when He died we died also, or were accounted thus to die. It is not said merely that He died for our sakes, for our instruction, for our example, for the establishment of our faith in that doctrine of immortality, which, if He were not the first to discover, He was certainly the first to demonstrate and render familiar to all mankind. Though all these beneficial ends, and many besides these, were brought to pass by His innocent death and meritorious sufferings, yet more than this is surely implied in the expression that we are dead in Him; nor am I aware of any manner in which

the action or suffering of one person can thus be placed to the account of another, except when that first person is the substitute or representative of the other.

It is thus that, in the common affairs of life, and in the ordinary language of mankind, we are often ourselves understood to do or suffer whatever is done or endured by another on our behalf, by our procurement, or for our advantage. If a friend pays a debt for us, it is we ourselves who have discharged it. If a substitute serves for us in the army, we ourselves have performed whatever duty the military conscription imposed on us; if our representatives impose a tax, we, that is the whole nation, are supposed to have consented; and when our friends or kindred answer on our behalf in baptism, it is ourselves who, by this means, are understood to become parties to the privileges and engagements of Christianity. If Christ, then, have been in any circumstances of His life or death, the representative of another, that action or passion, whatever it shall have been, may, in this form of speech, be imputed to the person represented; and if, on the other hand, we are declared, as in the words of my text, to have paid the debt of mortality when Christ died, it must be that our Lord in His agony and His bloody sweat, in His cross, His passion, and the rest of those affecting details which are familiar to the devout recollection of every believer, was the representative and substitute of all those who look, through Him, for salvation.

And thus, and thus only can we understand those other texts of Scripture in which the Son of God is represented as made a curse for us, as bearing our sins in His body on the tree, as performing that for us by His own sacrifice of Himself, which the sin-offering of the elder world professed, though vainly, to accomplish; expressions, all of them, which, by any other method of explanation, are as unsatisfactory and as unintelligible as those passages, without this clue, would be, which speak of living men as virtually and in law deceased, through the death of another person.

It is true that all these expressions are confessedly and highly figurative. But the object of all scriptural metaphors, I might say of all metaphorical language, when it occurs in grave and serious writings, is to illustrate and render more vivid, not to perplex and obscure the subject of which it treats. It is the collation of familiar objects with objects less known, in order that the one may enable us to understand the other; and when the effects of Christ's death are described in terms taken from the Roman law of debtor and creditor, from the forms of Jewish jurisprudence and the institutions of Jewish sacrifice, it is in vain to deny that a resemblance must subsist between the objects thus brought together. It must follow, then, that the death of our Lord was strictly vicarious and propitiatory; that He suffered in order that we might escape; and that we all, but for Him, must have been liable to the same sorrows, or sorrows

greater than those which, in His person, satisfied the displeasure of an offended Deity.

Nor will the objections, however plausible, endure a calm enquiry, which have been often levelled against this cardinal doctrine of our faith, as if it were inconsistent with the goodness of the Most High to demand an expiation for our sins at all, and contrary to His justice to admit the sufferings of the innocent as an expiation for the offences of the guilty. But these objections may seem, in part, to arise from the habit, not uncommon with men, of regarding the visible world as the complete circle and utmost limit of creation; and in part, from inattention to that analogy which, as I have often had occasion to notice, exists and might be expected to exist between every part of natural and of revealed religion; between the dispensations of God's will and wisdom in His ordinary and visible government of the world, and those further discoveries of Himself which He has vouchsafed to us through His prophets and His Son.

That God might, if He had so pleased, have forgiven our iniquities on no other condition than our own imperfect repentance; that He might have blotted out our sins without any conditions at all; that His mercy and tender love for His creatures, separately considered, might naturally be expected to incline Him to such unlimited indulgence, are positions, certainly, which I am neither prepared nor anxious to deny. But that any of God's known attributes made it necessary for Him thus to par-

don us; that no circumstances could have power to restrain or qualify the exercise of that indulgence, is a conclusion at variance with all the little which is known of God's relations with His creatures. God is not a Father only, He is a Lawgiver, moreover, and a King. Nor is it over mankind alone that His authority and His care extend, but over a universe of sentient and responsible agents, of which, it may be, the children of earth are among the smallest and most insignificant nations. And that justice (which is mercy on a larger scale) may effectually forbid or materially qualify the exercise of single acts of compassion; that a righteous judge may sentence those whom he most pities; and that the fillet of the allegorical Themis is, sometimes, as needful to conceal her tears as to prevent her partialities, there are those among my hearers who have been personally and most painfully sensible.

We know the ancient eastern fable which tells us that not only have angels tempted mankind, but that mortals have had power to seduce the angelic nature. And, to leave such unfounded and over curious speculations, it cannot be thought impossible that the example of our rebellion might have been contagious, had not the Almighty and the Allwise, while remitting the more fatal consequences of sin, thought fit to brand the sin itself with tokens of displeasure, and to demand an aweful and a painful price as the purchase of his forgiveness.

With still less reason do we object to that dispensation of blended mercy and justice, which al-

lowed a divine and guiltless Being to put Himself in the place of a guilty world; and to conciliate, not only by His obedience, but by His sufferings, the favour of the Supreme towards his creatures. Those sufferings, it should be remembered, great as they were, were neither in their degree, nor in their duration, nor in any other respect, than the infinite majesty and holiness of the Person who submitted to them, equipollent with the load of misery and of sin which was, by these means, removed from the race of mankind and the stained and burthened universe. Those sufferings, though an ample, were not an excessive price for the glories to which they led the way; for the adoration and gratitude, the faith and the affection of millions on millions of rescued souls; for the indulgence of a love immeasurable and inconceivable; such a love, (ten thousand fold sublimed beyond the loftiest pitch of parental tenderness) as mercy unbounded may have felt for the undone, as the Creator of all may have experienced towards His erring creatures.

Such vicarious sufferings, lastly, are consistent in every circumstance with that general and acknowledged law of the universe, which has made labour and pain the portals to every great and exalted object, and has rendered it, for the most part, impossible for us to benefit others essentially, except at the price of exertion and privation to ourselves. Is it a new thing under the sun for men to bear one another's burdens? Is nothing of health,

is nothing of repose, is nothing of domestic happiness relinquished by those who watch for the weal of nations; who defend by their wisdom, their valour, their personal perils and sacrifices, the peace of millions whom they have never known, and who know them, if at all, by name only? The friends who sit sadly and silently beside our beds while we are labouring under those miseries which (it may be) our own sins or indiscretions have brought on us, are not they, to no inconsiderable extent, the sufferers for our transgressions, and is not the chastisement of our recovery upon them, and can we be healed save by their sorrows?

We remember the beautiful drama of Alcestis; how the young and innocent wife surrendered herself to an untimely grave, that, by her sacrifice, she might snatch her husband from his appointed doom, and glut the jaws of the grisly phantom which kept watch before the gate of Admetus. But, in this tale, it is the mythology only which is fabulous. In the rest, *agnosco fortunam muliebrem, agnosco muliebre ingenium!* I trace in this description the character and the frequent fate of that sex which, with pain and anxiety, brings us into the world, which, with pain and anxiety, watches over our first slumbers, which, as we are gradually sinking to our latest sleep, supports and cherishes us with more than maternal tenderness, which endangers and abandons its own youth, its own ease, its own health and life, to lengthen the days, and alleviate the sufferings of unconscious infancy, of selfish

old age, and of querulous and unthankful sickness!

Let me not be misapprehended! I do not mean (God forbid I should meditate such a blasphemy!) I do not mean to compare for a moment, in degree or importance, these comparatively trifling instances of self-devotion with that love which disrobed itself of Deity, and stooped down to weakness and tears and pain and insult and mortal agony, for the deliverance of beings so weak and wretched as the children of Adam. But this I will maintain (inasmuch as it is founded on the grandest and best known phenomena of the moral and visible creation), that such a deliverance, and so obtained as that of man by the celestial Redeemer, differs only in degree from the corresponding instances to which I have referred as of daily and hourly occurrence; that, in common life, no deliverance was ever wrought by one man for another without the exercise of some virtuous self-denial, the endurance of some voluntary suffering; that the justice of God in the work of our redemption can only be impugned on principles inconsistent with natural as well as revealed religion; and that the Almighty has but acted in conformity with the general scheme of His providential government, when He placed pain and peril in the road to so great a blessing as the restoration of a world; and when, in designing to bring many sons to glory, He first made the Chief and Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.

This doctrine, however, once established, it is apparent how much of blessed comfort, how much of glorious hope, result to us as its necessary consequences. When our nature sues for pardon at the mercy-seat of God, not with her own voice, but through the pleading of His Son; when a sacrifice is offered for us, not of bulls or goats, but of the blood of the eternal covenant, what room can remain for carnal fear, what regret of the mortality which we leave behind us? Nor is it our pardon alone which we may look for through the worthiness of our Advocate. So truly is Christ the representative of those for whom He was born, and for whom He died, that not only do His unmerited sufferings outweigh our debt of punishment, but His meritorious obedience is also reckoned to the account of His constituents. He lived as well as died for us; His prayers are ours; ours are His blameless innocence and purity; it was our nature which fasted with Him in the desert; it was our nature which was transfigured in the mount with Him; it was our nature in which, united with His person, and inseparable from Him for ever, the Almighty Father declared Himself well pleased! In Him we are the sons of God once more, and the Heaven whither He is gone to prepare a place for us, is henceforward not only His but our inheritance!

How is it then, in the second place, that a Christian lays claim to and establishes this virtual union with the Messiah! Nay, rather, how is it that, in the affairs of the present world, when a substitute

or representative is found for us, we receive him as our substitute, and make ourselves entitled to the merit (for in worldly no less than in religious transactions the idea of imputed merit is familiar) to the merit, I say, of his exertions? Surely, by trusting in his professions, by pleading his services instead of our own, his sufferings instead of those to which we ourselves are liable, and by doing all this in the confidence that he has really discharged our debt, that he has done and suffered whatever was necessary for, and sufficient to, our welfare.

And what is this but faith? What is there in all the legal forms to which men recur in similar transactions, their powers of attorney, their commissions, their public choice of representatives, whether for the affairs of a village or an empire; what is there in all these but an expression of confidence in the individual thus selected, that he can and will, sincerely and effectually, do for us that which is needful to be done, and to do which, of ourselves, we are unable? Or is there more than this implied in the solemn ceremonies of our religion, in all the words which, by the appointment of the Church, are employed as expressive of our inward feelings? In all alike, we acknowledge Christ as our Advocate, our Representative, our Preserver; in all we profess to surrender our cause entirely into the hands of this our Champion, and submit ourselves, our own weakness, our own errours, our own blindness, to His merits, His strength, His conduct, and His wisdom. Our baptism, our eucharistic feast,

our daily prayers, and our daily services, alike are taught to repose on Him, and are offered up through Him to the Almighty as means and symbols whereby we plead the merits of His blood as a cause why judgement should not be passed against us, and reply, in the words of St. Paul and in answer to that doom of mortality which attaches to our guilty nature, that we are no longer criminals, since our punishment is past; that we are no longer debtors, since our debt is paid; that we are no longer mortal, since we are already virtually deceased in the person of our substitute; that we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God!

It is through Christ, then, that we are saved; and it is by faith that the merits of Christ are rendered applicable to our salvation. And it now only remains for me to point out in what manner, on these two principles, depend all the leading circumstances of a Christian's life and feelings.

It is, in the first place, plain that this view of our condition and our prospects must cut up by the root all lofty opinions of ourselves, all confidence in our own virtues, and all expectation of being able, by our own merits and exertions, to please our Judge and pass the gates of Paradise. The very act of committing our cause to another implies a renunciation of all power to help ourselves; and it would be worse than folly, while professing to rely on what Christ has done and suffered, to encumber this authorized and effectual plea with considerations so trivial and irrelevant as our own

weak efforts, our own little sacrifices. We know, indeed (so good and gracious is our God), we know from Scripture that not even the least of those labours which proceed from our love for Him and for our fellow-creatures, will remain unnoticed or unrecompensed in that day when even a cup of water bestowed for Christ's sake shall not fail of its exceeding great reward. But we know also, and it becomes us to bear in mind, that the rewards of virtue are matters of favour and mercy, not of debt or covenant; that, do all we may, we must still remain unprofitable servants, and that our redemption from death and our entrance into life are alike assured to us through the merits of our Redeemer only.

On the other hand, it is needful to observe, though it may possibly have already occurred to most of my hearers, that though our good actions cannot add to the validity of a pardon which has been already obtained for us through the merits of another person, yet, doubtless, our evil actions, or the neglect of our necessary duties, may detract from, may annul, may defeat and overturn the execution of whatever might else have been the gracious purposes of God, through Christ, concerning us. There is an infinite difference between the power of obtaining a thing for ourselves, and the power of preventing another person from obtaining it for us; and this distinction is then most evident when, as in the case of all the promises of the Gospel, the very terms of the favour granted are, in a

certain degree, conditional. He who claims immortality as having already passed through a virtual death, must beware how he does any thing which can tend to vitiate his plea; and in the very notion of a separation from the body, its passions and temptations, the idea is implied of an existence intellectual, innocent, pious; a perception of Divine things the more vivid as disencumbered of that material frame by which the energies of the soul are now clogged and hebetated; and a solemn but not a hopeless expectation of that hour when, being clothed anew in a glorious and incorruptible body, we shall receive the final accomplishment of Christ's work, and the reward of our life-long patience!

I cannot now do more than notice the opposition of this sentiment of the apostle to that gloomy code of false philosophy which degrades the undying mind into a property of perishable matter; which transforms the glories of Paradise into the darkness of a lengthened slumber; and which resolves the resurrection itself into a reproduction of something which shall bear our name. Against such a philosophy, or such a religion, the voice of reason, the feelings of humanity, the testimony of Scripture, alike cry out aloud; against such dogmas the souls of the righteous protest from their tranquil dwelling, where St. John beheld them in vision beneath the altar of their Lord; against such the promise of Christ to the dying robber, and the argument by which Christ overcame the petulance of the ancient Sad-

ducees, are alike triumphant. But, in that moral application of the doctrine with which I now am principally concerned, it is apparent that an answer is thus supplied to all the principal arguments with which the tempter is wont to assail us; and that, if we only act up to our professions, there can be no stoicism like that of the Christian. The terrours and enticements of the present life can have no force to disturb the tranquillity or ensnare the spirit of him who is declared to have already paid the debt of nature. What power hath an earthly tyrant over the man who has renounced his life, or why do we so fondly linger in a world which is no longer our appropriate residence? The intensity of hope had done that, in our instance, which, in the case of the ancients, a pompous philosophy attempted in vain. With Heaven before our eyes we cannot descend to the allurements of a lower region; with Hell in our recollection the terrours of the world are children's play. Let this be our answer under every trial of our faith and patience, that the motives which our tempters urge might certainly be unanswerable to those whose life is in the body; but that on us they fall as idly as buffets on the air, inasmuch as we "are dead, and our life is hid with Christ!"

But, "alas," it will be said in reply, "this pretended death to the world, while the world still ranks us in the number of its living inhabitants; this pretended escape from the body while we still feel hunger, and cold, and pain, is no more, after

all, than a mockery of our misfortunes; inasmuch as our freedom is imaginary, while our duties are real, and we are by no means empowered to withstand the enticements of our mortal nature by these empty boasts of a fictitious and virtual dissolution."

I answer, that the lesson which in these and similar passages the apostle conveys is sufficiently intelligible, as illustrative of those principles by which a Christian is to confirm his faith and perform his duty; though the expressions be figurative, and though our present imperfect condition makes the application of the rule, to its full extent, impossible. And this, while we remain on earth, must be the case with every exalted and heavenly principle of action, inasmuch as our utmost efforts can never attain to that purity which alone is well-pleasing to God, that rectitude of perception and clearness of soul to which our spiritual nature is of itself inclined to aspire.

But that we cannot do all to which these heavenly principles should lead us, is no reason why, perceiving their excellence, we should not follow them as far as possible: and that much is in our power even our own experience will convince us. If we must not actually neglect or destroy the body which is regarded as dead, we can, certainly, by self-command and self-denial, so far overpower its mutiny, as that it shall no longer be able to extinguish or defile the spiritual principle within us. If we must wait our time before we can really take

leave of the world, we may, at least, so fix our attention on that departure, the time of which is fast approaching, as that all which the world can offer or threaten shall have little more power to move us to evil, than the same inducements possess over those disembodied spirits to whose number we are shortly to be added.

Above all, however, since that freedom from earthly evil which death confers is conferred by death alone; since, while our fleshly tabernacle endures we must remain, to a considerable extent, under the dominion of sorrow and of sin; since the world is, to a Christian, made up of little else than afflictions and snares; and since much of which the world makes boast as most advantageous, he is called on to renounce before he professes Christianity, how deeply may we be sensible of the truth that our abiding portion is not here; and how courageously and how joyfully should faith enable us to contemplate the approach of that day when all danger and temptation shall be no more, and when, not by a figure only, but in the reality of repose and blessedness, we shall be "dead, and our life be hid with Christ in God!"

Death, it has been well and eloquently said, is to those who view it firmly, no more than a change of habitation. Even in this world we may often die; and whosoever finds occasion to tear himself from the friends of his earliest love and the scenes of his happiest recollections, will have experienced some of the worst and bitterest pangs by which our

final dissolution can be accompanied. But it is in the power of us all so to fill up the measure of our pilgrimage in this world, as that the separation which we so much dread, whenever it comes, can never be eternal; but our parting with our friends may be the prelude to a happier and more enduring friendship in those regions where love is unalloyed and truth unsuspected, and where we shall reap their blessed harvest!

THE END.

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